Response to Request for Comment on the District of Columbia's Transparency
and Open Government Initiative

Submitted To:

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Request for Comments

What government information should be more readily available online or more easily searched?

Information that is useful to citizens and internal stakeholders should be readily available online in a searchable, centralized location. Towed vehicles, restaurant health inspections, outstanding warrants: the leaders of the open data movement have learned through trial and error which datasets the public finds most useful. The following "Top 10 Datasets" showcase those categories citizens access most often.

- Crime Data
- Restaurant Inspections
- Permits and Licensing
- 311 Data
- Zoning Data
- Property Tax Data
- Location of Public Facilities
- Business Listings
- Financial Transparency Data
- Performance Management Data
- Others: Transit, Budget, Procurement, Election and Campaign Finance, Taxation, Housing & Property Information, Consumer Safety, Frequently Requested FOIA Data.

Progressive Open Government initiatives should include policy which prioritizes publishing government information and data that *(NYC's Local Law 11 of 2012 excerpt)*

1. Can be used to increase agency accountability and responsiveness;
2. Improves public knowledge of the agency and its operations;
3. Furthers the mission of the agency;
4. Creates economic opportunity;
5. Responds to a need or demand identified by public consultation.

Government information containing personally identifying information or other data that will impede the effectiveness of a department or information which could jeopardize a citizen's health or safety should be carefully considered for omission and/or cleansed prior to publishing publically.

Socrata works with our clients via the following 8 step plan to help identify data that aligns with the Open Government Initiative goals.

1. Identify the data that supports your strategic goals;
2. Adapt your open data goals to your local context;
3. Start with the data already on your sites;
4. Analyze your web traffic;
5. Analyze your FOIA and public information requests;
6. Request feedback from citizens;
7. Interview your staff;
8. Don't reinvent the wheel. Copy what works.

The full 8 Step Plan can be seen at (http://www.socrata.com/open-data-field-guide-chapter/the-data-plan/#two)

Which Document or Data Formats Should be Available for Online Information?
For data to achieve maximum value, it needs to be available in multiple formats for use by audiences of varying levels of technical sophistication. A modernized way to focus on making data useful and usable is by *consumerizing* it. Data consumers fall largely into three groups of constituents:
- **Executives, Business Managers, Information Consumers and Decision-makers**. This group needs a consumer-style experience which offers easy access to insights, outcomes or impacts that data represents, without the need for technical wizardry. They want to read stories and interact visually with the data in a context that facilitates decision-making with readily available answers to their questions.
- **IT Practitioners and BI Developers**. This group needs a quick and efficient way to explore data interactively, but once the data is understood they want to access data programmatically through application programming interfaces (APIs). This group also needs developer tools and resources – documentation, bootstrap code, getting started videos, a test console, etc. – in order to quickly focus on building solutions with data.
- **Analysts, Researchers, Journalists, Scientists, and Economists**. This group needs to analyze data efficiently, often by creating visualizations that compare data, to show its relativity or to show it in geographic context, or analyze bulk data using advanced analytical tools like STATA, Tableau, SPSS, R or Microsoft PowerBI.

In order to reach as many different types of consumer as possible, data needs to be consistently available in a variety of file formats including:
- Comma-Separated Values (CSV)
- Tab-Separated Values (TSV)
- Excel XLS/XLSX
- Extensible Markup Language (XML)
- JavaScript Object Notation (JSON)
- Resource Description Format (RDF)
- RDF Site Summary (RSS feeds)
- Keyhole Markup Language (KML)
- Shapefile (SHP)

How might advisory committees, rulemaking, public hearings, social media or emerging technology be better used to improve decision-making?

Many progressive governments including the City of Baltimore and the State of Maryland have turned to performance management "Stat" programs (CitiStat and StateStat respectively) to transform their organizations into a data-driven decision-making government that leverages technology by:
1. Collecting and centralizing data
2. Mapping data to key priority areas and organizational goals
3. Visualizing data dynamically
4. Building custom reports & dashboards
5. Tracking progress

Once data is collected and contextualized, it empowers stakeholders in committees, policy makers, and the public to shift from intuition-based to fact-based decision making, promotes collaborative

problem solving, and engages citizens in performance improvement programs. Steve Spiker, Director of Research & Technology at Oakland's Urban Strategies Council, captures this well when he said, "What open datasets open up is a future where citizen experts can easily provide qualified perspectives on government decisions, analysis and statements. This is a democracy that can support the role of citizens in active decision making" (*Beyond Transparency - Open Data and the Future of Civic Innovation*, 2013, p. 116).

As an example of data's use in public meetings to drive decision-making and resource allocation, see the following (http://kansascity.granicus.com/MediaPlayer.php?view_id=2&clip_id=7813) to a recent video from a KCStat (Kansas City, MO) meeting led by Mayor James. You will see that the Mayor and his KCStat team drive the departmental reviews and agendas using the Socrata GovStat platform.

What alternative models exist to improve the quality of decision-making and increase opportunities for citizen participation?

In addition to the on-the-ground meetings that should be hosted pre/during/ongoing via the Open Government initiative, technology can also help by incorporating social connection via consumer comments, form driven responses, data requesting facilities, consumer optimized web-experiences and social media capabilities.

Hosting hack-a-thon events is another great way to energize and engage citizens, consumers, and the technology community. With proper community support and leadership, these events can be a productive means of promoting specific initiatives, datasets and government priorities to encourage collaborative problem solving.

For example, the city of New York hosts an annual "Big Apps" competition where citizens, subject matter experts and civic developers work on the city's "Big Issues" to help solve major challenges affecting residents, visitors and businesses. They have identified four focus areas (Jobs and Economic Mobility, Energy Environment and Mobility, Lifelong Learning, Healthy Living) and encouraged citizen participation via a sponsored event with prize money and recognition going to the winners. The Big Apps competition has been a tremendous success story for leveraging government information to drive problem solving, and citizen participation in big-city government.

Responsive, authentic public engagement is essential for long-term open data initiative success. Formation and support of a citizen-led advisory board can provide The District with strong and focused feedback that could be organized in conjunction with the City's ANCs (Advisory Neighborhood Commissions) to help ensure inclusive and representative feedback. One such citizen-led advocacy group is the New York City Transparency Working Group (http://nyctwg.org/) whose members include civic advocates and civic-minded technologists.

What are the limitations to transparency?

Transparency is traditionally the initial driver for Open Government Initiatives. The limitation of transparency is that although it solves accountability concerns, it does not address underlying issues affecting efficient government service delivery and performance management. Gathering information from across the organization provides a unique opportunity to then leverage that data for more mature capabilities than Transparency, such as data-driven decision making and public collaboration.

Data formatting can also be a limitation in transparency initiatives. In order to make data actionable and accessible, it is important to provide visualizations, context, descriptive column headers and metadata to describe the data and field level descriptions that make sense to all consumers.

What policy impediments to innovation in government currently exist?

Given the recent emergence of open data initiatives, impediments to innovation in this arena come as no surprise. One of the biggest impediments to innovation in this arena revolves around education and exposure: what open data is and how it can benefit government, citizens, and comprehensive policy. Innovation in Open Government can lay the foundation for inclusive participation that results in transparency and engagement

Lack of exposure to new technologies - Given the budget cuts forced upon government in the last decade, public institutions have not been able to take advantage of many of the technological advancements made in open data and performance management. Doing more with less has meant that many government agencies have not looked at progressive technologies which can enhance existing processes without draining already tight budgets.

Lack of Comprehensive Governance - Comprehensive policy and governance are required to create an environment that fosters innovation. Best practice open data policy emphasizes inventory and evaluation of all datasets, timelines for release, equality across departments and enforcement towards identified goals. The District should take advantage of successful models that have worked in the past when considering governance.

Governance examples and resources:
- New York City - (http://www.nyc.gov/html/doitt/html/open/data.shtml)
- Chicago - (http://www.cityofchicago.org/city/en/narr/foia/open_data_executiveorder.html)
- Sunlight Foundation Open Data Policy Guidelines - (http://sunlightfoundation.com/opendataguidelines/)
- Socrata's Open Data Field Guide (http://www.socrata.com/open-data-field-guide-chapter/)

What changes in training or hiring of personnel would enhance innovation?

Open data provides an opportunity to think about the organization's data as a strategic asset and use it to drive innovation. If the role exists, the CDO (Chief Data Officer), in partnership with the CIO, can be the overall leader of the open data initiative, internally and externally.

A CDO can help an organization become information-centric and implement a strategy to leverage its data for service innovation and performance improvement. If the District needs help understanding the CDO role, read Socrata's interview with Brett Goldstein, CDO, City of Chicago (http://www.socrata.com/open-data-field-guide/socrata-interview-brett-goldstein-city-of-chicago/)

Other team members who should be considered for an innovation team include the 10 resources listed in the "How to Assemble a Winning Team" chapter of the Open Data Field Guide here: (http://www.socrata.com/open-data-field-guide-chapter/assemble-a-winning-team/).

What performance measures are necessary to determine the effectiveness of open government policies?

Open Government policies are aimed to improve the Transparency, Participation and Collaboration capacity of the District Government and a variety of performance measures should be considered when evaluating the effectiveness of the policies, including but not limited to:

- Transparency
  - Achieve a "10 out of 10" on transparency, according to grades given by watchdog organizations like U.S. Public Interest Research Group (PIRG) and Sunshine Review;
  - Number of Datasets released;
  - Number of participating departments;
  - % Agency Compliance;
  - Percentage of all public information requests deflected to self-service channels and money saved;
  - Number of data silos eliminated;
  - Reduction in 311 calls and service requests;
  - % FOIA requests deferred;
- Participation & Collaboration
  - Number of Clicks;
  - Number of Visits;
  - Number of Embeds;
  - Number of Social Shares;
  - Number of Comments;
  - Number of API queries;
  - Number of Apps developed;
  - Number of Apps downloaded;
  - Measured citizen feedback on impact/knowledge of open data.
- Improve Government Performance
  - Number of businesses created;
  - Economic activity generated.

Over time and with greater attention to specific initiatives, The District will be able to report on open data's impact on improving program performance and proactively improve underperforming programs. The City of New York captures a variety of compliance and success metrics to measure their Open Government performance using Socrata on a public facing website here: (https://data.cityofnewyork.us/compliance)

Beyond Transparency, Participation and Collaboration metrics, the District should look at how Open Government helps improve and track the quality of life for its citizens and have defined metrics that openly demonstrate the District's progress towards those goals. For example, San Mateo County has paired Open Government and quality of life by tracking their performance across five categories of Community-based goals (https://performance.smcgov.org/).

We work with our customers to define clear and measurable performance goals for Open Government Initiatives by following this framework defined in our Open Data Field Guide Chapter: (http://www.socrata.com/open-data-field-guide-chapter/define-clear-and-measurable-goals/)