OPEN DATA

MAKING GOVERNMENT
MORE TRANSPARENT

In the information age, pressure on local governments to be more accessible and collaborative is increasing.

They're being called on to provide more information to agencies at the state and federal level, residents, business partners, prospective business owners, tourists and many others. Sharing this data generates great value, whether it's for planning purposes or to provide services to individuals. A freer flow of information can make government far more effective even as it drives efficiencies.

MANAGING A FLOOD OF INFORMATION

Governments depend on large amounts of information stored in disparate systems, databases, spreadsheets and in some cases, even on paper. More comes in every day, from paper forms, departmental and agency records and online resources. In addition, data from sensors and cameras is being captured, stored and analyzed. It's a rising tide and all of it is considered crucial to administering a responsible government.

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Opening up those data stores, identifying what's needed and securely making it available for use on an equal-access basis is a major challenge. Communities may lack the proper technologies, procedures and governance, or fail to see enough constructive uses for their data to deem the effort worthwhile.

SHARING AND USING OPEN DATA IN A RESPONSIBLE AND CONSTRUCTIVE MANNER

To be useful, raw data needs to be curated, scrubbed of sensitive information, made discoverable and presented in useful form to authorized users. With the right software solutions, procedures and expertise to determine what data to share and how it should be accessed, municipal governments can better leverage this information to create maximum benefit for the community.

Data and analytics can be powerful tools, whether used for finding the most cost-efficient service provider or keeping public infrastructure in good repair through proactive maintenance. The potential applications of open data are limited only by imagination.

A foundation of well-designed systems can connect disparate data stores to make relevant information easier to find and use, serving it up in a variety of forms depending on need and access privileges. It could be presented through a web portal, delivered as raw data for external analysis, displayed as imagery or processed through a visualization tool. These open data sets are typically sanitized, with names and personal information redacted, and are used in accordance with policy guidelines that govern how the data can be used, shared and referenced.

ATTRACTING PROSPECTIVE BUSINESS AND DEVELOPMENT PARTNERS

According to the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development,1 "By making their datasets available, public institutions become more transparent and accountable to citizens. By encouraging the use, reuse and free distribution of datasets, governments promote business creation and innovative, citizen-centric services." That's a winning proposition for all involved, with tangible benefits for citizens, business owners and government alike.

The basic infrastructure, technology and data necessary to move forward already exist; what's needed is a way to put it to productive use. With the right approach, the passive information that every municipality has can be transformed into actionable, open data that enables greater benefit for the community.

[1] http://www.oecd.org/gov/digital-government/open-government-data.htm

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