**Open Government: Policies, Portals, and Programs**

Local governments worldwide are putting their data online. Some are experimenting with [data visualization dashboards](https://datausa.io/), issue-specific websites, and [performance metrics](https://www.sandiego.gov/pad/programs/opendata) to improve their communities’ quality of life and to better deliver public services. Some are offering developer resources and information to allow businesses and community members to incorporate open data into their own tools and processes. And some are using data to engage residents to collaborate to [solve specific challenges](http://www.govtech.com/data/A-Better-Way-to-Release-Your-Citys-Data.html).

While states and most large cities have adopted some form of an open data program, many others have less robust offerings, but are identifying potential public data sources and beginning to publish them for public use. This push to move toward a comprehensive open data framework can help communities make important decisions, monitor the impact of those decisions and create more effective and responsive services.

Getting local government to provide more open data is easier if there is already a framework set up to take in requests, identify datasets and connect them to outcomes, and integrate data into public decision-making and community use. If this doesn’t already exist, community groups may be working with government to make it happen. A recent [article](https://sunlightfoundation.com/2017/06/29/heres-how-creative-city-officials-want-to-make-open-data-more-useful/) from the Sunlight Foundation provides several examples of community-government collaboration underway. This effort is more involved than requesting a dataset through official channels, but it helps create the infrastructure needed for robust local data sources, a continuous approach to providing updated datasets in a timely fashion, and, ultimately, tools and information to provide your public officials and residents with data for decision-making.

In some communities, the library is already participating in the development of local government policies or data release. In other places librarians are part of the local Code for America brigade, helping to advocate for more data and putting it to use for the public good. These relationships are emblematic of the unique space libraries occupy - part of government, but embedded in their communities in ways few other public sector organizations are. Belonging to these two places provides libraries a unique opportunity to hear from community members and bring those voices to the meetings colleagues might be having as it writes its open data policies.

**Resources for Open Data Policies**

If you are considering increasing your involvement in open data to help strengthen or expand your community’s open data program, Sunlight Foundation maintains a [set of resources](https://sunlightfoundation.com/policy/local/) for local advocates, including a discussion of [best practices](https://sunlightfoundation.com/opendataguidelines/) for open data. Sunlight also provides a [policy wizard](https://sunlightfoundation.com/2017/01/26/open-data-policy-wizard-helps-you-create-your-own-policy/) to assist communities with building their own open data policy resolutions.

While open data policies are still in their nascent stages, the most effective ones so far envision using data to track community indicators, inform local public policy, and improve service delivery. At a minimum, these policies define open data, commit to making public data available in a machine-readable, shareable format, and create a position or a person responsible for understanding what data the city has available, knowing what data needs the community has and publishing some portion of the city’s open data online. The extent to which personnel can be applied to this can vary - local governments take a variety of approaches, including adding these responsibilities to their IT departments, creating city management positions, and developing whole units devoted to performance and analytics. Several excellent examples are attached: [San Diego, CA](http://www.opendatapolicies.org/doc/san-diego-ca-2014-11-24/); [Louisville, KY](http://www.opendatapolicies.org/doc/louisville-ky-2013-10-11/); and [Oakland, CA](http://www.opendatapolicies.org/doc/oakland-ca-2013-10-15/).

**Other Resources:**

Data.gov - [City Open Data Resources](https://www.data.gov/cities/cities-policies)

World Bank - [Open Data Essentials](http://opendatatoolkit.worldbank.org/en/essentials.html)

Socrata - [Open Data Policy Resources](https://socrata.com/open-data-field-guide/developing-your-open-data-policy/)