Civic Switchboard

Talking Points: Why Libraries Should be Key Participants in their Civic Data Ecosystems

This one-sheet provides a set of talking points you can use to advocate to yourself, your colleagues, your administrators, community groups, potential partners, and funders. Are we missing something? Let us know.

Working with Civic Data Probably Already Aligns with Your Library Mission

• Your library probably already considers **data literacy** as increasingly important for its staff and community to cultivate.

• It is also likely to consider community engagement, specifically **working to strengthen its communities**, equally important.

• Because it's a good strategy for addressing tough problems (and because funding is often tight), collaborating with strategic partners may be a point of emphasis.

• Developing your library's role in its civic data ecosystem can address all of these goals.

Helping to Lead and Grow Your Local Community

• The local level is where the most innovative and forward-looking ideas around open data are developing. The Sunlight Foundation has written, "cities are now setting the leading examples for public data, from policy, culture, collection to engagement and reuse... they are increasingly providing best practices and learning from experimentation that federal governments should learn from and adopt."

Wunderlich, J., & Sunlight Foundation. (2017, May 23). https://sunlightfoundation.com/2017/05/23/trump-threats-to-data -and-us-cities/

• Libraries are community anchors, firmly connected to local communities and practice; **libraries and their workers should be helping to lead the development of their civic data ecosystems**.

You Won't Go Alone: You Can Strengthen Existing Partnerships and Build New Ones

• Cultivating a healthy local civic data ecosystem takes the **coordinated efforts of a variety of data intermediaries**; no single entity can be expected to cover all of the necessary roles alone.

• As your library works in its own ecosystem, you'll continue to learn about other players and entities. Where possible, take on roles that complement and strengthen existing capacity.

• **Partnering includes working with other libraries, too!** If you are in an academic library, explore civic data partnerships with your public library, and vice-versa.

Sharing the Value of Library Workers' Expertise and Ethics

• The act of publishing data alone does not always result in community impact. Data intermediaries help the public apply and use open data to achieve impact.

• Data intermediaries build relationships among publishers, users, and other members of the ecosystem, improve data, statistical, and technological literacy, enhance data quality, provide feedback mechanisms to publishers, and build tools that enable broader data use.

• Libraries and librarians should act as core civic data intermediaries; our expertise adds value to a wide range of issues that affect both data publishers and users. As Shannon Mattern, Associate Professor at The New School, puts it:

> *"We must push our civic leaders to bolster their planning teams with experts in the ethical collection, organization, preservation, and dissemination of information resources. Urban data programs should be counseled by professionals who understand the complex issues of equity, privacy, and security. Librarians on the planning commission! Archivists in the police academy! ... They are guardians of a critical, contextual approach to information, which is a public resource every bit as necessary as streets and sewer lines."*

Mattern, S. (2016). Public In/Formation. Places Journal. https://doi.org/10.22269/161115