Goals:

1. Explain what cities can expect *after* they post a policy online
2. Identify common commenters by group (civic tech/academia/etc.)
3. Identify popular “sticking points”, i.e. things that residents care about
   1. Most popular sections, most popular comments, number of comments
   2. Sentiment analysis
   3. Popular authors’

**Understanding the Impact of Crowdlaw**

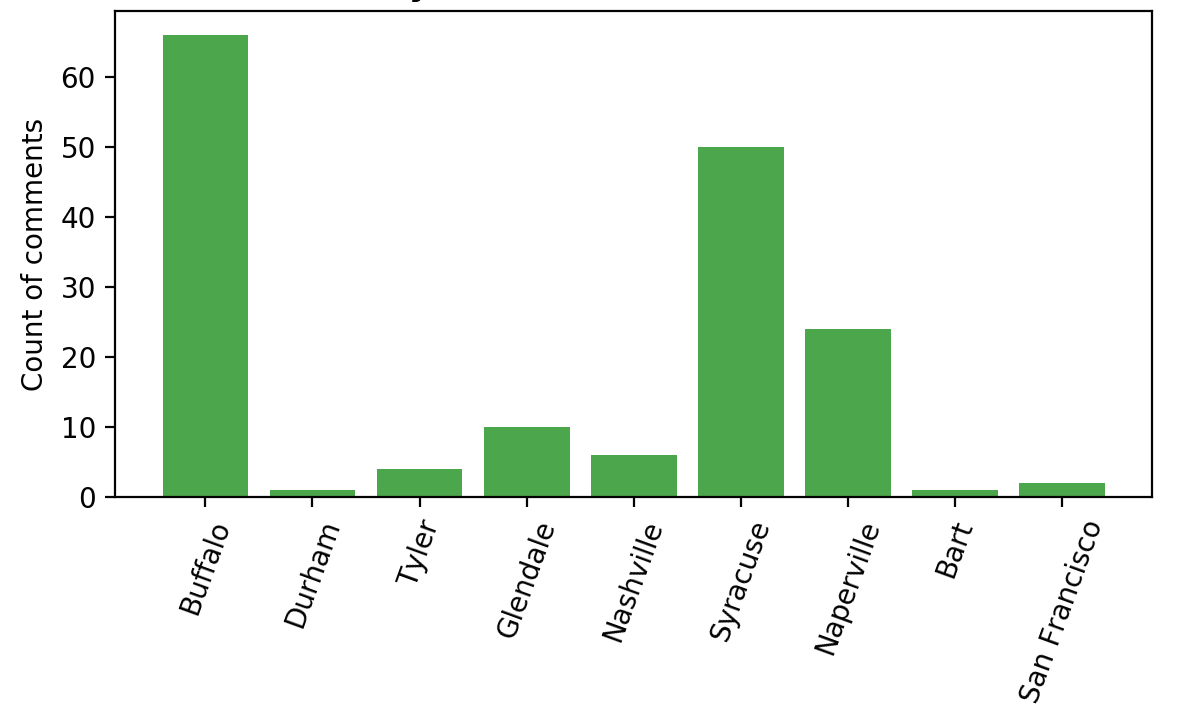
Crowdlaw for open data policy is [an approach for collaborative policy drafting](https://docs.google.com/document/d/10LKN0s9M0JhNFaAFuZzfd32cUQYcPKvaogriTzN4zgc/edit?usp=sharing) between residents and city governments. It gives residents an opportunity to provide online feedback on policies, which helps cities build better relationships with residents and get real insight into how open data will affect residents’ lives.

If you have read our [Intro to Crowdlaw](https://docs.google.com/document/d/10LKN0s9M0JhNFaAFuZzfd32cUQYcPKvaogriTzN4zgc/edit?usp=sharing) brief and explored our [case study about how Pittsburgh implemented crowdlaw](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1fRWUpmqbdOFOuWF_LOHEHkOCsAGW_esVWmTYYH93Asg/edit) with Google Docs, but still have questions about what crowdlaw looks like, this explainer is for you. Over time, we have helped 41 cities use crowdlaw, and compiled a [Crowdlaw Tracker](https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/10pOyaJRtKCpvNk3IZFLmVZEeNZJ4yaeaku2Ax7oL68g/edit#gid=0) to catalog their experiences.

For this explainer, we have individually and collectively analyzed cities that used [Madison](https://opengovfoundation.org/projects/madison-project/) to host crowdlaw activity: Buffalo, Durham, Tyler, Glendale, Nashville, Syracuse, Naperville, Bart and San Francisco. Thanks to Sunlight’s experience in helping cities with crowdlaw, we have looked at some of the most common policy sections based on number of comments made by users, top policy sections that received most positive, neutral or negative feedback, and characteristics such as the professional backgrounds of the users who comment.

**How does the the community participate in open data crowdlaw?**

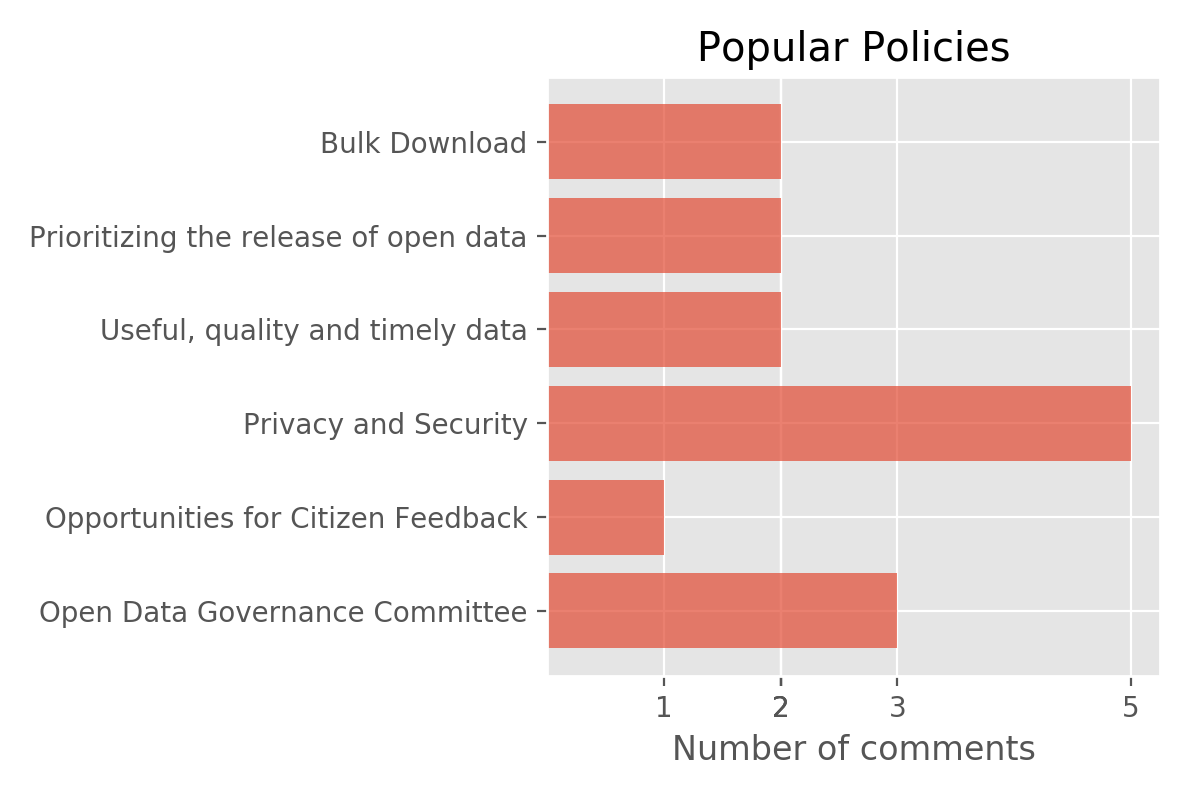
***Level of engagement based on total comments***

The cities of Buffalo, Syracuse, and Naperville had the highest levels of community engagement when using crowdlaw. The City of Buffalo, in particular, [conducted a targeted outreach](https://sunlightfoundation.com/2017/03/23/how-opening-data-and-policy-to-the-public-online-can-make-both-better/) to find out potential users of its open data policy and centered the policy around those users so that they can effectively participate in crowdlaw. On the other hand, Bart, Durham and San Francisco received only a handful of comments. These cities have had open data policies well in place for some time, and they were found to be well developed and overall satisfactory. 

That said, cities that are drafting their first open data policies should seek multiple methods to galvanize public participation in crowdlaw, instead of making the policy online and waiting for residents to comment.

***Popular policy sections***

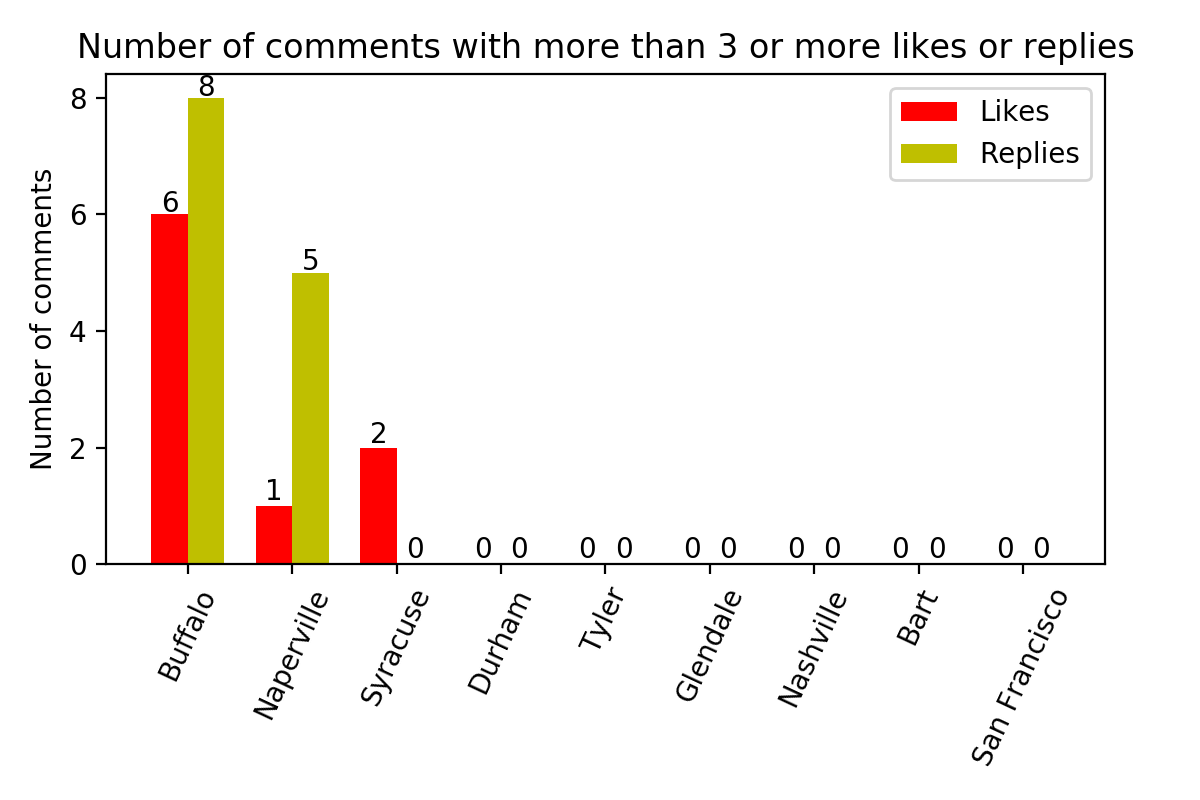
When cities understand which policy sections are most popular, it can help them anticipate how people will react to their open data policy. Cities can use this information, ahead of time, to prepare materials and answers to effectively engage with community. In our analysis, popular policy sections are those that have been quoted by different people two times or more.

A number of people expressed questions on the ability of open data to handle private and sensitive information **(City of Syracuse and City of Buffalo)**, and appreciated the role that Open Data Governance Committees can play to solicit feedback and ideas from residents **(City of Naperville).** 

The comments also show that users don’t only question or appreciate the policy but also encourage additional changes where necessary. For example, in the following example, the user expressed that he would like the datasets to be more interactive and customer-friendly, instead of only existing in a high quality format.



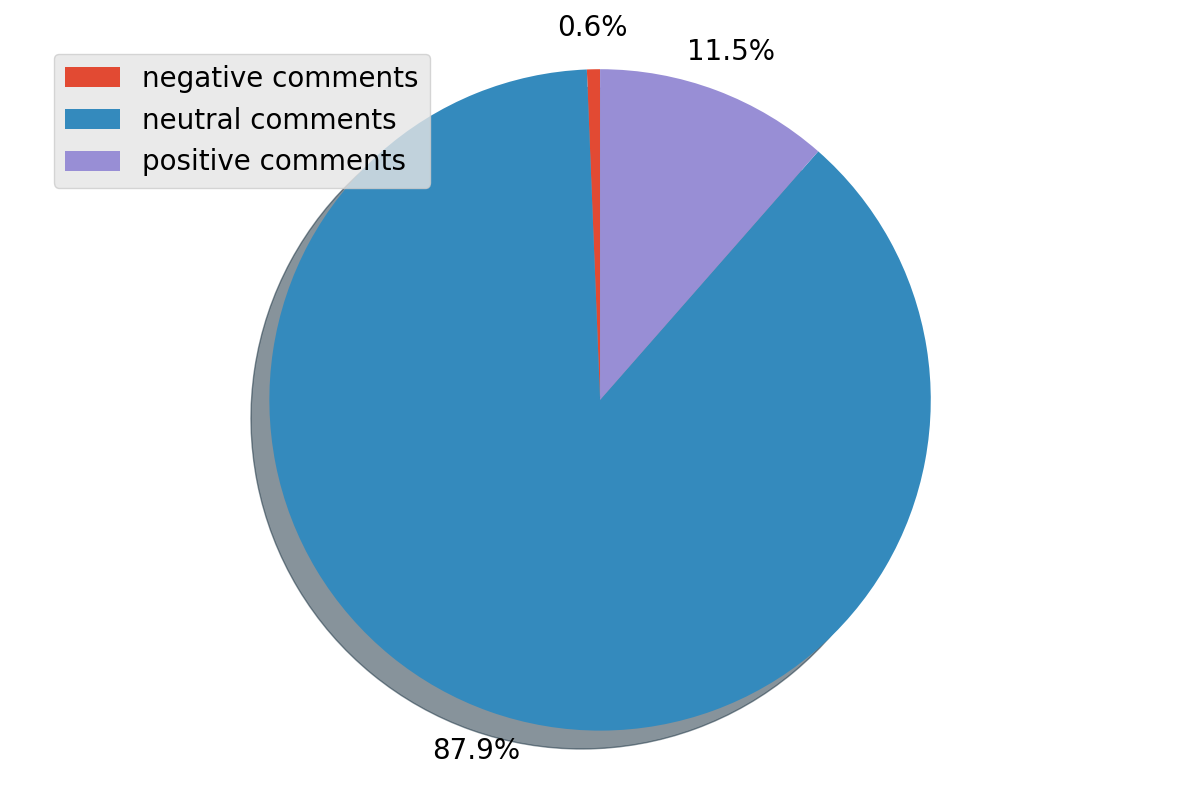
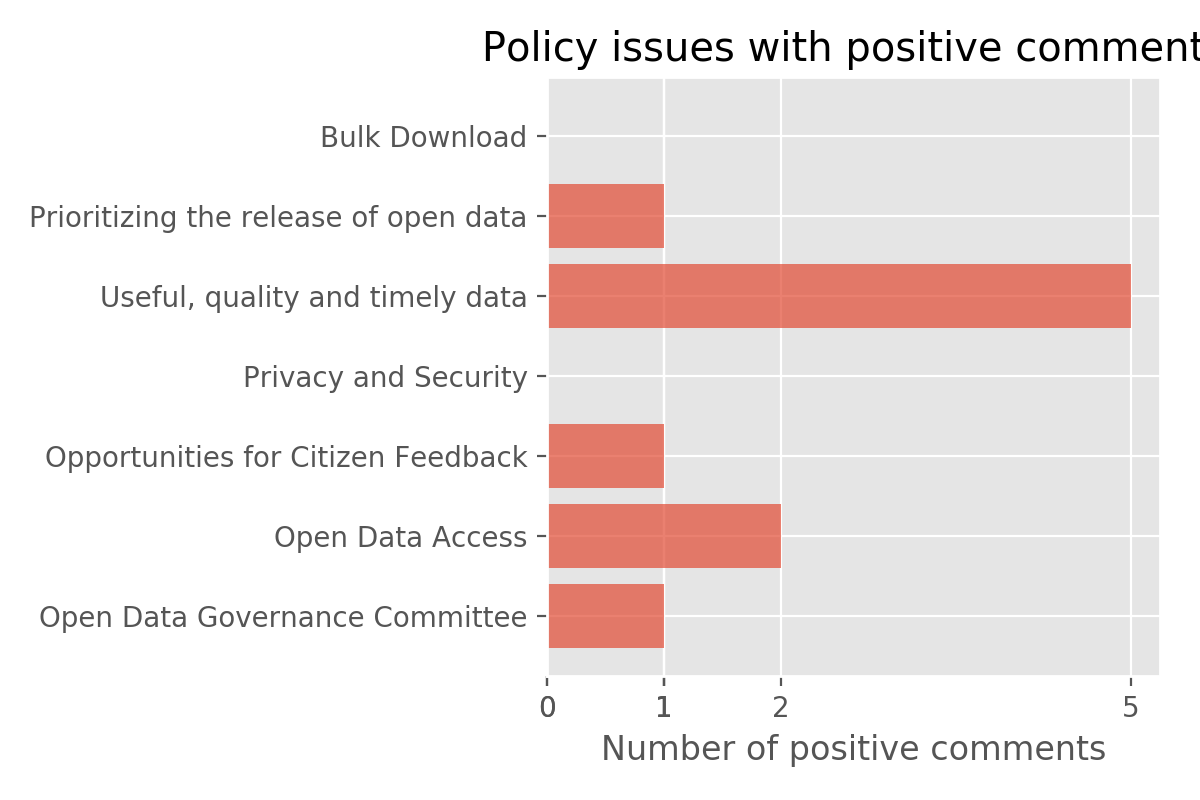
While the suggestions asking for governments to provide opportunities for more community feedback were few, they were highly “liked” or “replied to” by other people. Mark Headd, Innovation Specialist at 18F, commented on the Syracuse’s Open Data Policy that a board, comprising of public members and other stakeholders, should be established so that the opinions and interests of residents are taken into account.

We consider comments to be popular if they have been ”liked” or “replied to” (by other people) three times or more. Comments were most popular in the cities of Buffalo, Naperville and Syracuse given the higher levels of community engagement in these cities. 

Some other highly liked or replied to comments were regarding tools to make data easily accessible and useful by creating metadata **(Joseph Gosen, Buffalo)** or presenting data in a range of formats such as xml, shapefile etc. **(Karyn Tareen, CEO, Geocove - Buffalo).**

Most of these popular comments tend to come from users who have found open data portals difficult to navigate, access or use, or people who find governments’ efforts to solicit feedback from residents insufficient.

***Residents’ emotional reaction to open data policy***



About 88% of comments were either questions to understand policy better or suggestions for improvements to different policy sections. In general, people were curious to learn more about how confidential data will be handled, how the FOIA requests will be processed and whether they will be made available in a timely manner, and potential for community organizations and academic institutions to host data on open data portals.

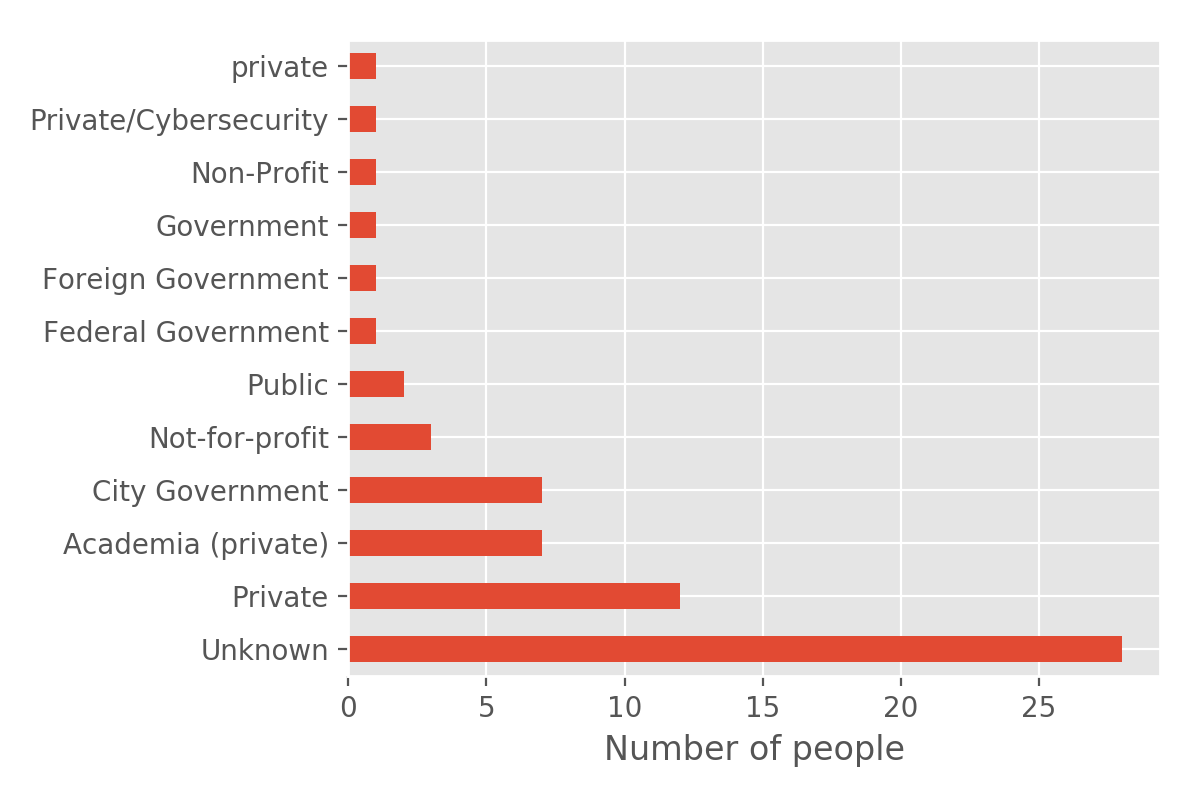
Many people also made suggestions. Aaron Krolikowski, a researcher, on the “Privacy and Security” section of Buffalo’s Open Data Policy, said:



Furthermore, a handful of users also expressed enthusiasm. For example, Jurnell Cochren, a software developer, was delighted to see that the City of Nashville provided a Data Catalog for all its datasets so that users can understand and explore the datasets easily.

Andrew Nicklin from GovEx was the only person to have made a less favorable comment. It was regarding the City of Buffalo’s policy on releasing private information. He said that the city should take into account “risks to the public” before making any data public.

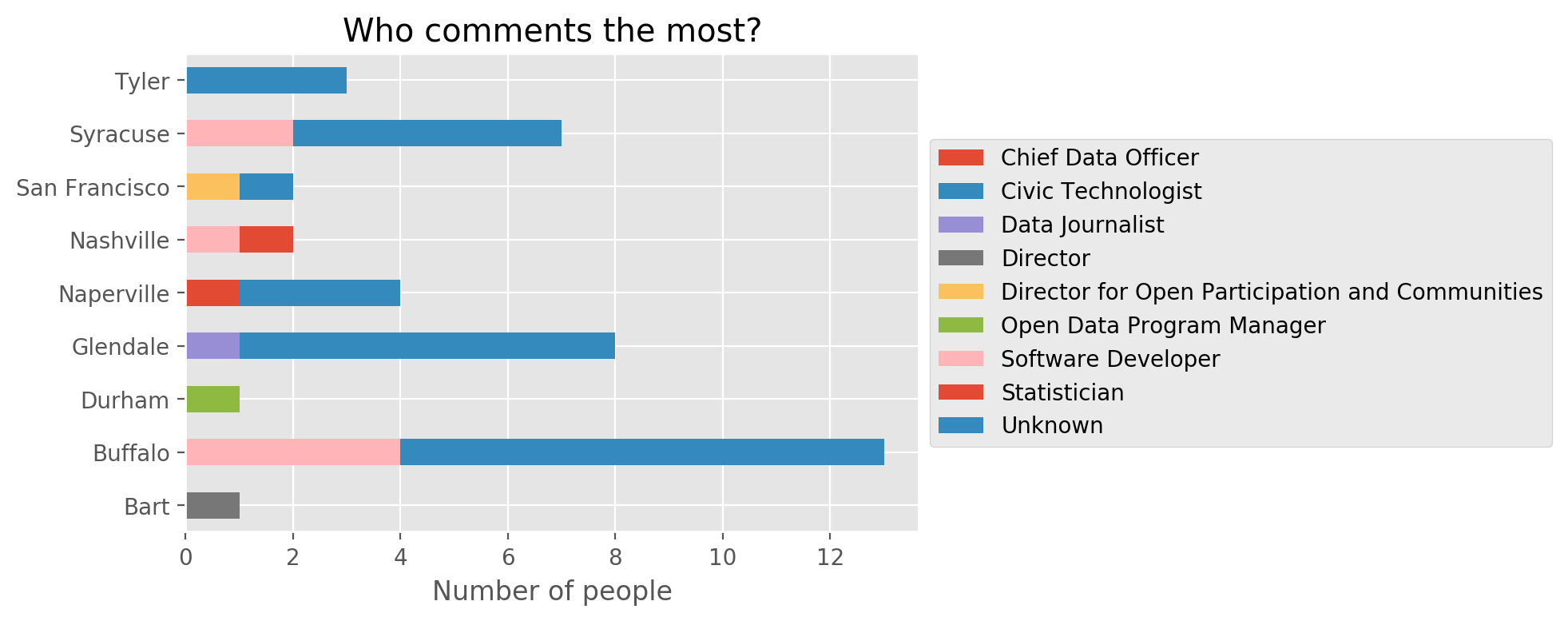
**Understanding the user segments of crowdlaw can help cities expand the open data reach**



Out of 65 unique users whose comments we analyzed, 27 of them belong to the “Unknown” category, meaning we weren’t able to locate their professional details online. It is postulated that most of the people who belong to that category are common citizens. There is also a handful of people who is affiliated with academia, public and not-for-profit sectors, showing that people from diverse professional backgrounds participate in crowdlaw practice.

Most of the people in categories other than “Unknown” had a technical background, in the sense that they worked in technical jobs in the government or were part of private tech companies. In Syracuse and Buffalo, both the technical and non-technical audience, has enthusiastically participated in crowdlaw.

This is due to the cities efforts to mobilize community members through social media and on-the-ground [surveys](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1tewPPwVD6BBXLx9eYf4YwgpX3HEMS3PaQZRRUzPfcq8/edit).



The City of Arlington should also seek multiple avenues to reach out to as many residents as possible. This will help the city incorporate public ideas and suggestions in its open data policy before it is enacted, instead of waiting for a problem to surface later on. When the crowdlaw practice is conducted carefully - by soliciting feedback from public, properly following up, re-writing policy drafts, and evaluating the impact after the policy is enacted - it can greatly strengthen ties between residents and the government.