Public sector organizations are driving wiser and more informed decisions by leveraging open data and the technology platforms that manage data

Executive Summary
Improving governance, or simply the way government works, is one of the key strategies enabled by open data. Data-driven governance should lead to improved performance and accountability. The adage "what gets measured, gets done" should encourage more government leaders to set clear, measurable goals for their organizations, and rigorously track performance against those goals. Making this valuable resource easily available to both constituents and public servants alike—in a format and context that's easy to consume—helps to foster a culture of thoughtful and data-driven decision-making, and is one of the four pillars of value that should inform any open data initiative.
Defining Activities

There are many components to ensuring a public sector organization can leverage their open data to help improve governance. When implemented successfully, an open data initiative can encourage better decision-making and drive positive outcomes, enabling the organization to:

- Leverage a systematic approach to defining and tracking goals
- Deploy interactive public dashboards to show performance data
- Take advantage of data visualization and employee-facing analytics apps to extract insights
- Employ sophisticated data collection capabilities, including crowdsourcing and sensor networks
- Work to eliminate system silos and provide centralized, web-based access to data

Driving Better Decisions

Forward-thinking government leaders understand the data generated by their organizations is an extremely valuable resource that can be harnessed in a variety of ways. One of the most important functions of government in the twenty-first century is as an aggregator and disseminator of valuable public information. One of the quickest ways this information can be put to work on behalf of the entire community is to leverage it to drive better decisions, both within the organization and on behalf of constituents.

Obviously, the concept of using information to make decisions is a fundamental hallmark of human intelligence. There's nothing new or revolutionary about that. What is relatively new and revolutionary is our ability to now harness vast amounts of information in ways we have never done before. One individual with access to data can put that information into context and leverage it in conjunction with their experience to inform their decisions. This can be quite powerful. But the resulting decision is ultimately limited by the expertise and wisdom of the individual and quality and amount of data available.

The real power of decisions driven by data becomes clear when access to data is open to a broad and diverse set of users, and the systems providing that access present the data in a user-friendly and relevant context. In such a scenario, the value of the data is not limited by any one individual's ability to recognize its utility, nor is its value hampered by only providing "summary information" or otherwise truncated data sets. The intersection at which knowledge, wisdom and experience intersects with valuable data is the place where well-informed decisions are made and the benefits of those decisions have the broadest impact.

Data Driven Decisions Brought To Life

Public sector organizations large and small are leveraging their open data initiatives to specifically drive better decision-making. While many of these initiatives are predicated upon specifically improving internal processes, there are also public-facing components that should be considered. The beauty of any open data initiative is that the same platform and information can be used both by and within the organization to drive better governance as well as by constituents, who are able to participate in, contribute to and even improve the outcomes. A few examples include:

- **Cook County leverages a systematic approach to define and track goals**

  Cook County's performance management program began in January of 2011, when the County passed an ordinance that required each office and agency to set goals and collect operational data around those goals.

  Officials quickly realized it was difficult for constituents to dig into the dense pdf reports they published and digest the information in a useful way. They adopted an open data initiative that enabled them to publish the data already gathered and deliver it on a more flexible, user-friendly, open, and transparent platform.

  Once the data was made available to the entire organization, Cook County entered phase two of the implementation: using that data to drive decisions. One early goal emerged from the Finance and Administration Department's need to measure employee time and attendance. The data they collected helped identify policy abuse or data entry errors, reducing average monthly employee sick leave from over seven hours down to 4.66 hours over a one year period.

  This data-driven decision-making approach also allows for the dynamic evolution and improvement of goals. Until recently, the main goal of the county's environmental inspections of industrial facilities was to simply ensure that 100 percent of the facilities were actually being inspected. With easily accessible data now confirming that this goal is being met consistently, the county can now able to focus on the quality and outcomes of those inspections.

- **San Mateo County deploys interactive public dashboards to show performance data**

  The San Mateo County government is also known for its deep commitment to transparency. The County's Shared Vision 2025, a comprehensive community planning process designed to get direct input from citizens, is a sterling example of an open, collaborative governing style. So when county residents approved a half-cent sales tax increase in 2012, the Board of Supervisors promised that residents would be able to see how their tax dollars were being spent.

  After implementing an open data initiative, the County Manager's Office used the system to help departments define goals and metrics for their respective funding proposals. This online system features a dashboard with a series of interactive tiles, each acting as a hub for the goals associated with a specific initiative. By clicking on the tile, users can explore performance measures, review raw data, read the actual proposal and view charts, graphs, and maps created with the data.

  This makes it easy for constituents and public officials alike to create maps and other visualizations of the data collected. These visualizations help identify where the greatest needs are throughout the county, driving budget choices based on objective data.
Online: some of the defining activities listed at the beginning of this paper can be true value of open data. Enabling truly data-driven decisions is a critical important to make sure your initiative goes far enough to unlock the true value of open data. Enabling truly data-driven decisions is a critical important to make sure your initiative goes far enough to unlock the

If your organization already has, or is in the process of launching, an open data initiative. Kansas City leverages open data to associate high-level outcomes with underlying metrics

The city of Kansas City, Missouri has embraced open data, encouraging data-driven decisions by leveraging the information it collects through its KC Stat initiative. Openly available, easy-to-consume and provided online, the KC Stat data dashboard is a valuable resource used both internally by city staff and by external constituents.

From an internal perspective, weekly staff performance management meetings are organized around data available through open data and the dashboard, helping managers to clearly illustrate performance and drive accountability. These metrics not only report on the progress of initiatives, they also help drive decision-making by providing important and dynamic performance information.

The city also leverages open data to provide this same performance data to constituents through monthly KC Stat public meetings. These meetings are held in-person and also made available for constituents to participate in online. Individuals can view the proceedings live, and also participate in a live Twitter feed, where key nuggets of information are shared and users interact with city officials. Constituents not only get a clear picture of how their officials are performing, but they can also leverage the data to provide input back to the city and influence decisions.

The power of Kansas City’s open data initiative comes from the combination of its ability to procure useful and relevant data while providing compelling visualizations of the data that are easy-to-understand. For both city officials and their constituents, this results in a shared understanding of the impact of every initiative at a high level as well as clear insight into the details that drive success.

Additional Ways Open Data Can Help Drive Better Decision Making

Improving governance does not always mean simply using available data more efficiently. Sometimes, crowd-sourcing new data can create insights that were impossible to collect just a few short years ago. Some recent examples include:

- In California, the state transparency portal saved the state over $20 million when visitors identified an audit that showed that many of the vehicles in the state’s fleet were not needed.
- After visiting South Dakota’s transparency website, a reporter requested additional information on subsidies that led legislators to save about $19 million per year by eliminating redundancies in their economic development program.

So What Can Your Organization Do?

If your organization already has, or is in the process of launching, an open data initiative, that’s a great start. But like the examples cited above, it’s important to make sure your initiative goes far enough to unlock the true value of open data. Enabling truly data-driven decisions is a critical component to optimizing an open data initiative. Contemplating how some of the defining activities listed at the beginning of this paper can be implemented should be a part of any open data initiative.

Until recently, implementing an open data initiative specifically to help improve governance and decision-making might have seemed like a daunting task. It might have involved asking internal IT resources to help build a data-warehouse and an interactive experience that enables users to access the data they need to inform their decisions. The good news for public sector leaders looking to take this most powerful natural resource is the availability of cloud-based services. Easy-to-own innovations can now help organizations manage open data by seamlessly connecting with existing systems and delivering an intuitive user experience for a fraction of the cost of building one on your own.

Leveraging data to help drive more informed and better decisions is one of the quickest ways an organization can maximize the value of an open data initiative. But the data must be easily accessible and presented in a format and context that enables the user to leverage it appropriately. The only way to insure that the right data is available in a manner that both constituents and staff alike can use to help make better decisions is to work with experts who can help present your data and information in a user-friendly manner.

Conclusion

There are many benefits to tapping into public sector data to help inform decision-making and drive better governance. Data-driven decision making is one of the key pillars of value that public sector organizations can realize from undertaking and rolling out an open data initiative. The benefits to doing so can be highly beneficial – both internally and externally – in the form of better run, more efficient government as well as increased citizen engagement and improved outcomes for constituents.

The open data movement is rapidly evolving. As more government organizations recognize the benefits that come from simplifying access to the massive amounts of public data they already have, civic leaders are keen to assess the value of open data projects. The concepts around driving better decision-making through access to open data presented in this paper highlight the importance of understanding both the broad requirements and potential gains from investing in the next wave of public sector innovation.

Utilizing the Open Data Value Framework

The open data movement has expanded from focusing on government transparency as an end in itself to the realization that it can yield economic and social value across a much wider spectrum. As part of its Open Data Value Framework, a structured methodology for defining the impact of open data at various phases of adoption and use, Socrata has identified four pillars of value that every organization should consider when evaluating how to engage in any open data initiative.

1. Citizen Experience
2. Data-Driven Decision Making
3. Operational Efficiency
4. Economic Impact

Based on industry practice and extensive field research, Socrata’s series of reports is intended to serve as a definitive resource for public-sector organizations looking to plan, evaluate, and evolve their open data initiatives.

PILLAR 2: DATA-DRIVEN DECISION MAKING
For those organizations that are still evaluating development of an open data initiative, this paper is just one of the many resources made available by Socrata for initiating discussion and building consensus among elected officials, IT and operations staff, and other key stakeholders. Public sector organizations are encouraged to leverage these resources to make a more informed and data-driven decision around the investment needed to support an Open Data initiative.

About Socrata

Socrata is the world leader in cloud solutions for open data and data-driven governments. Its innovative customers include the cities of New York, Chicago, San Francisco, Los Angeles, Melbourne and Eindhoven; the states of New York, Illinois and Texas; US Health and Human Services, Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services; the UN and the World Bank. Socrata’s solutions—including the recently launched Open Data Network™ which unleashes the full potential of government data to help drive connected communities around the world – assist government leaders in improving transparency, modernizing citizen access to information and bringing data into every decision, all with unprecedented speed and cost savings. Delivered as turnkey services, Socrata’s technologies unlock data trapped in enterprise silos, mobilize and transform it into useful information that everyone can easily access, visualize, share and reuse. To learn more about Socrata, visit www.socrata.com.