

# The Socrata Open Data Value Framework:

## Pillar 1: The Citizen Experience



### Optimizing The Citizen Experience to Unlock the Value of Your Open Data Initiatives

Public sector organizations are leveraging open data and technology platforms that manage the data to help them deliver a high-quality user experience to their constituents

### Executive Summary

Forward-thinking government leaders are aware of the need to not only provide greater transparency, but to also deliver high-quality user experiences that live up to modern consumer standards. They recognize that one of the most important functions of government in the twenty-first century is as an aggregator and disseminator of high-impact, public information. Putting this valuable information at the fingertips of constituents, in a format and context that's easy to consume, that delivers a highly-satisfying experience, is one of the four pillars of Socrata's Open Data Value Framework that should inform any open data initiative. This white paper explores the first pillar of value, the Citizen Experience.

## Defining Activities

There are many facets to ensuring that constituents interacting with a public sector organization's data enjoy the same level of user experience as they do in their experiences accessing other information. When implemented successfully, an open data initiative delivers an enhanced citizen experience that includes many positive outcomes, enabling the organization to:

- Foster citizen participation in government decisions
- Contemplate user-friendly digital services leveraging web and mobile technologies
- Access government services via location-aware mobile apps
- Integrate with consumer web services (i.e. Google Maps, Yelp, Zillow, etc.)
- Actively promote data transparency efforts

## Making Access To Data Easy

Today's taxpayers are more informed than ever, and many actively seek out public information and expect it to be available without too much hassle. Their expectations are set by the consumer-technology they interact with in every facet of their lives. From news to shopping to travel to entertainment, they are provided with rich interactive experiences that enable them to find the information they need to make everyday decisions. They expect no less of an experience from the public sector organizations they interact with.

For most of history, constituents wishing to access information from public sector organizations had to submit a request to the organization. An individual within the organization would then need to act on that request, and eventually, the information was produced. It was an onerous and time-consuming process for all involved.

With the advent of the Internet and online access, information became much more readily available. Documents could be digitized, and posting static documents like PDFs or spreadsheets online was, until recently, considered a best practice for open and transparent governance. Not much attention was placed on making the information easy to use or understand, but savvy constituents who knew where to look and what specifically to look for were rewarded with the information they sought, and public officials took pride in the fact that the information was being made freely available to all.

But most constituents who interacted with public sector organizations still had very little idea about what information was available and how to get access to it when they needed it. And as user behaviors and expectations have evolved, pressure has grown on public sector organizations to provide a high quality user experience for constituents. More and more are seeing the value in making their data open and available in a manner in which anyone can easily access and consume it in a way that turns the raw data into relevant and useful information.

For public sector organizations contemplating adopting an open data initiative, and wondering how to make the user experience optimal, budget data is an ideal place to begin. Budgets are typically relatively stable sets of data. Once a budget is finalized and approved, few changes or updates to the data are required, making the budget a

perfect starting point for organizations wishing to share data publicly without taking on a maintenance burden. Most importantly, the budget impacts virtually every constituent, so the information contained within is of great interest to a vast majority of the population.

Making the data easy to access and navigate is key to providing a high quality user experience. Some people looking for budget data may just want to understand what is being budgeted for a specific line item, others may want to get a sense of trends over time, while more may need all of the raw data from a specific time period or classification in order to drive a new app that they are developing. If the data being sought is not freely available and usable for all of these specific needs, it might as well still be under lock and key. Regardless of the organization's true intentions, if a self-service search for data and information is unproductive for constituents, and the data is not open and accessible, the result can be frustration, or even worse, an erosion of trust in the public sector.

Providing easy-to-access information to constituents also signals to the community that a public sector organization is interested in the participation and ideas of taxpayers. By making their data not only accessible but also easy to understand, these organizations can enhance trust and provide a useful resource that helps educate the public.

When public sector data presented in a manner that is difficult for the average person to understand, the result can often add to the confusion about how the process of government works. Hardworking public sector organizations establish policies and implement decisions with the very best intentions. But taxpayers who don't have the same frame of reference and intimate understanding of how those policies and decisions were arrived at will naturally have questions that need to be addressed.

Providing constituents with the same level of access to publicly available data, in a format that's easy to understand, not only fosters trust, it also provides common ground for reasonable discussion, bridging the gap between public servants who live and breathe the language of governance every day and taxpayers who may or may not be familiar with all of the vagaries of government operations, but who still simply want to better understand how their government works.

When data is open and the information is presented in a manner that's easy to digest, the result is a better-informed public with increased trust in their public officials based on a clearer understanding of the underlying financial details governing the priorities that need attention.

## A Better User Experience Translates To Cost Savings

Open data can also promote quality-of-life innovations in ways that only a government-as-a-platform business model can enable. We've seen examples of data-savvy governments using open data to help businesses like Yelp enrich their services, seamlessly connecting millions of people to vital sources of public information like restaurant health inspection scores. Other examples include instances where the open data initiative doesn't just provide a great user experience for constituents, but it also helps control costs and increase efficiency. These include examples like:

- **San Francisco's** Chief Innovation Officer reports that citizen access to real-time transit data resulted in 21.7% fewer SF 311 calls which yielded a savings of over (US) \$1 million a year.

- In 2013, users accessed **Washington State's** checkbook tool over 80,000 times, and ran approximately half a million reports – all without requiring assistance.

## Enhanced Citizen Experience Brought To Life

Municipalities of all sizes are harnessing their data to deliver enhanced services and provide a better user experience for their constituents. Some recent case studies include:

- **Chicago, IL.** In 2012, the mayor of the third largest city in the U.S. issued an executive order to ensure that the City continued to release new data. This order also empowered the Chief Data Officer to work with other City departments and agencies to develop new datasets. The City is following an aggressive schedule for both releasing new datasets to the public and in updating existing sets.

With access to more than **1,000 open data sets** on-line, constituents have helped develop a wide variety of mobile apps, including a **flu shot finder** and a partnership with a local lab that enables the city to more rapidly and accurately pinpoint the City's **rat population**.

- **San Francisco, CA.** One of the pioneers in the open data space, San Francisco, recently re-launched their citizen portal to make information more easily searchable. The city segmented data by department, categorized the data displayed using common descriptive terms like community, transportation and public safety and identified for users what type of information was available (maps, charts, etc.). This has helped constituents, who may not be data scientists, more easily locate data that is relevant to them.

The city is also leveraging the data internally to help develop more innovative programs, including one launched recently, which helps the city's homeless population secure easier access to shelters.

While many larger cities appear to have taken the lead in leveraging open data to improve the citizen experience, scores of smaller and mid-sized municipalities have also made their own significant advances in this area including:

- **Kansas City, MO.** Having launched more than 3,000 data sets, Kansas City is making a concerted effort to place more community-based data on-line, and gaining a reputation as one of the leading mid-sized cities to launch an open data program. One initiative involves launching a court-scheduling data set consisting of court-related issues that would inform citizens of upcoming dates so they could participate and/or testify. And the city's dangerous buildings data set has provided community leaders with a valuable tool to better monitor potential crime-related issues in their neighborhoods.

Kansas City is also discovered that their data can help drive better decisions. In examining their historic focus on street re-paving, they gained important insight into what they had always assumed to be an issue that was important to citizens. They cross-referenced the street re-paving data with citizen satisfaction data and realized that removing litter from the streets, painting cross walks, and keeping the roads striped were much more important issues for the city to spend time, resources, and funding on than re-paving. This has to higher

satisfaction scores with constituents, while the data itself helped Kansas City re-tool their street maintenance program, saving money while increasing citizen satisfaction.

Many other smaller municipalities are working to leverage their data to the benefit of all their constituents, including Hartford, CT, New Orleans, LA, Halifax, Nova Scotia and many more. Cities of all sizes recognize that easy to use technology and cloud-based services make it easier than ever for even the smallest IT organizations to deliver a high quality user experience.

## 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 of organizations simply posting static documents on the web, make sure your initiative goes far enough to unlock the true value of open data. The user experience is a critical component to a optimizing an open data initiative and must be well thought out and given the appropriate consideration before introducing an open data technology platform or online app experience to the general public.

Until recently, this might have seemed like a daunting task. It might have involved asking internal IT resources to help build a user-friendly interactive experience that matches what users can find in the commercial world. The good news for public sector leaders looking to take advantage of their most powerful new natural resource, open data, is, cloud-based services that managed open data are now available that seamlessly connect with existing systems and deliver an intuitive user experience for a fraction of the cost of building one on your own.

There's only one chance to make a great first impression. If a constituent attempts to access public information that is powered by an open data technology platform or app and is frustrated by the user experience, they might not ever try again. That means an increase in calls and emails and letters instead of users accessing your web site and serving themselves. The only way to insure a great citizen experience is to work with experts who can help present your data and information in a user-friendly manner.

## Conclusion

There are many benefits to enhancing the user experience for constituents any time public sector organizations interface with them. And, an enhanced citizen experience is but one of the pillars of value that public sector organizations can realize from undertaking and rolling out an open data initiative.

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 improving the citizen experience 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.

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.

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## About Socrata

Socrata, the open data market leader, is the cloud software company focused exclusively on democratizing access to public sector data for the most innovative organizations around the world, including 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](http://www.socrata.com).