

Cities Run Better When Data and Leaders are Connected

govtech.com/data/Cities-Run-Better-When-Data-and-Leaders-are-Connected.html



This story was originally published on [Data-Smart City Solutions](#).

Inspiring cultural change is always challenging, but with the right leadership, inclusion and innovation can become driving forces for change and opportunity. Under the leadership of Mayor Eric Garcetti, Los Angeles' Data Team created the Citywide Data Collaborative, a group of data liaisons across departments who oversee the collection, cleaning, and quality control of their department data, and manage their datasets on the city's open data portal. Their work and collaboration with the Mayor's Data Team has introduced an unprecedented approach to how Los Angeles city government handles, shares, and uses data in all of its operations.

Meeting Demand for High-Quality Data

In December 2013, during his first year in office, Mayor Garcetti issued [Executive Order 3](#) on Open Data, which required each department to designate a data steward responsible for releasing departmental data to the city's two data portals, the tabular [open data portal](#) and the geospatial GeoHub.

In the first phase of the open data process, Open Data 1.0, data stewards were tasked with unlocking hundreds of datasets, evaluating their accessibility, publishing them to the open data portals, and developing processes for regular updates. Initially, the review and classification of the public datasets suffered from inconsistencies in definition and practice. With over 1,000 datasets and 45 departments, the Mayor's Data Team launched both a formal open data inventory process and the Citywide Data Collaborative to standardize the city's tremendous data

library for optimal use. The Collaborative developed the human infrastructure necessary to address open data challenges on a large scale.

Open Data 2.0 followed in October 2016, kicking off four months during which departments identified datasets to be added or deleted, or as geospatial data to be shared on the GeoHub. The Data Team developed a set of resource guides for the data stewards to standardize the cleaning process and track their progress. The resources included a [metadata guide](#), [example datasets](#), and a detailed inventory tracker that allowed departments to review the public datasets and assign an action to each. Additionally, the Mayor's Data Team held regular check-ins with departments to ensure each data liaison was able to meet milestones and complete the inventory tracker with their updates by the end of the inventory in January 2017.

Maintaining a high-quality data library is an ongoing responsibility of a city that aims to be inclusive and meet the needs of its residents. While the formal inventory process has ended, members of the Citywide Data Collaborative continue to use the resources to ensure that the city's data remains accessible and up-to-date. The City of Los Angeles also uses an internal Open Data Dashboard to track departmental data and incoming data requests, and to highlight city "data champions" who are actively contributing to the city's open data library.

Balancing good leadership and departmental autonomy

The success of the Los Angeles city data inventory process is the result of a developed structural plan complemented with departmental autonomy to complete the tasks. In creating the resource guides, the Mayor's Data Team intentionally left some room for interpretation so that only the data stewards could determine when to mark their metadata complete. In addition to using the City metadata guide, data stewards were asked to follow a data standards checklist that focused on five key areas: **consistency, accessibility, comprehensiveness, trustworthiness, and degree of interest.**

Consistent

- One parent dataset (when possible) with filtered views for ease of use or data sensitivity
- Required metadata is filled out
- Abides by documented refresh rate

Accessible

- Usable format on or linked out from LA open data site

Comprehensible

- Includes plain English field names, field descriptions, or a data dictionary
- Includes units

Trustworthy

- Data source is provided
- Any doubts about accuracy or limitations are noted in the description

Interesting

- Presents context such as in the description or through a visualization
- Enough data to draw patterns and insights

The checklist empowered the members of the Citywide Data Collaborative to judge the quality of their own data,

rather than waiting for data to be scored or critiqued externally. The resource guides also developed a new framework for data liaisons to use regularly in both open and internal data management.

“Because we built strong relationships within our departments we were able to leverage our internal connections and subject matter expertise to deliver data improvements more efficiently than if the Mayor’s office came in and met with data groups individually,” noted Patrick Woo, Operations and Statistical Research Analyst at the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power (DWP), and data steward for DWP, the department with the largest open data inventory.

According to Woo, the decentralized process had a “1+1=3 effect on [DWP’s] open data program.” Woo said he found the process challenging and rewarding, and it provided him with the opportunity to review all open datasets published since 2014 and look critically at how the public engages with departmental data. For Woo, the inventory process was the catalyst the department needed to “recalibrate and match what is currently captured in information with what the public wants to see.” Woo’s team is actively working on a plan to release geospatial data on the GeoHub to take advantage of its spatial analysis and identify new opportunities to better serve the people of the City of Los Angeles.

Building an Integrated Network for Citywide Data Management

The Mayor’s Data Team continues to leverage this citywide data expertise by regularly convening the members of the Citywide Data Collaborative. Aligned with Mayor Garcetti’s bottom-up approach to spur innovation from within departments, the Collaborative is instrumental in ensuring Los Angeles continues to lead as a digital and data-driven city. Since its launch in July 2016, the Collaborative has met quarterly to foster citywide coordination related to data management and analytics, and to tackle current challenges from open data automation and metadata, to data sharing and cross-departmental collaboration.

As the Collaborative develops, it has become a think tank of over 80 departmental data leaders who are evolving citywide standards as they realize Mayor Garcetti’s vision for a data-driven government. As subject matter experts in this field, the group serves as a data cabinet for the Mayor - instilling leading data management practices across the city while showing the value of using data for city service improvements.

“Meeting in the format of the Collaborative and doing data discovery process collectively demonstrates how data can bring people together and help them see a shared vision,” explains Umi Hsu, Digital Strategist for the Department of Cultural Affairs (DCA). Hsu values the Collaborative as a place to collect use cases for data as an asset, which Hsu uses to advocate for more data-focused projects at DCA. “Even though each department has its own story, there are pain points we all share and solutions that could be applicable beyond the context of one organization.”

The creation of the Citywide Data Collaborative has built a community of practice and developed the trust necessary for a citywide coordinated open data effort. Only a year since its launch, the Collaborative has already sparked inspiration for cross-departmental projects thanks to the knowledge exchange among peers. Through this initiative, Los Angeles has proven that an inclusive and collaborative city is also an innovative and well-run city.