



Leaders at the Core of Better Communities.
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2015 Local Government Excellence Awards Program
Program Excellence Awards Nomination Form
(All programs nominated must have been fully operational for a minimum of 12 months, prior to January 31, 2015)

Deadline for Nominations Extended to March 30, 2015

Complete this form (sections 1 and 2) and submit with your descriptive narrative.

SECTION 1: Information About the Nominated Program

Program Excellence Award Category (*select only one*):

- Community Health and Safety
- Community Partnership
- Community Sustainability
- Strategic Leadership and Governance

Name of program being nominated: dataMontgomery Open Data Dataset Strategy

Jurisdiction(s) where program originated: Montgomery County, Maryland

Jurisdiction population(s): 1,000,000+

Please indicate the month and year in which the program you are nominating was fully implemented. (Note: All Program Excellence Award nominations must have been fully implemented for at least 12 months prior to January 31, 2015, to be eligible. The start date [on or before January 31, 2014] should not include the initial planning phase.)

Month: December Year: 2012

Name(s) and title(s) of individual(s) who should receive recognition for this award at the ICMA Annual Conference in Seattle, Washington, September 2015. (Each individual listed MUST be an ICMA member to be recognized.):

Name: Fariba Kassiri

Title: Assistant Chief Administrative Officer Jurisdiction: Montgomery County, Maryland

2015 ICMA Local Government Excellence Awards Program

Open Data Dataset Strategy (Strategic Leadership and Governance Category)

PROBLEM ASSESSMENT

In December 2012, Montgomery County, Maryland passed open data legislation requiring the County to make public datasets available on a single web portal and develop an implementation plan for publishing our data. The resulting portal, [dataMontgomery](#), is similar to open data websites proliferating around the country, but the methods by which our datasets are identified and queued up for inclusion constitute a process from which other jurisdictions can learn. Often, jurisdictions require individual departments to populate the open data platform, resulting in a “kitchen sink” approach that publishes all available data without regard to its value. Rather than putting the onus on individual departments, Montgomery County has devised a strategic approach that not only respects the time and resources (technical, financial, and otherwise) that it takes to convert government data into an open format, but also identifies the information likely to be of the most value to our residents and employees.

Montgomery County has 28 Executive Branch departments and offices, each of which maintain more than 650 servers, and more than 600 applications, databases, and spreadsheets from which “data” may be derived. In order to abide by our open data legislation, perform the required work in an organized/centralized fashion, apply the same technical standards to each dataset, and determine the appropriate order in which they would be released, we needed to devise a unique strategy. The challenge was to determine how the dataMontgomery team was going to inventory and prioritize datasets across all the departments, comprised of approximately 10,000 employees across the County, and identify available datasets from hundreds of Department systems.

PROGRAM IMPLEMENTATION AND COSTS

Early efforts to collect datasets for inclusion on the open data platform included surveying departments on what they considered to be high value data, and researching what information was requested most often by residents and the press via formal Maryland Public Information Act (MPIA) requests. It became clear that a more formal, centralized data inventory and assessment process had to be put in place if we were to achieve the vision of the legislation and meet the needs of residents and other stakeholders who have come to expect a high level of transparency from Montgomery County Government.

The dataMontgomery Workgroup - composed of representatives from the Department of Technology Services (DTS), Montgomery County Police Department (MCPD), CountyStat, the Public Information Office, the Office of the County Attorney and the Chief Innovation Officer (CInO) - developed a systematic approach to identify, inventory, prioritize and queue up datasets for publication. This process, which includes a scorecard to help prioritize the datasets, is believed to be the first of its kind for open data programs. This scorecard and the process being implemented is something from which other governments can learn.

Departments were asked to identify Points of Contact (POCs) with whom the Work Group would interface. One POC was identified per Department, and assigned the responsibility of compiling the dataset inventory for their Department. The team invested in each POC, educating them on open data concepts, joint data sharing and sensitive/confidential data awareness through webinars and office hours. Monthly meetings were held with all POCs to review expectations, answer questions, demonstrate the value of open data, and educate them on different aspects of confidential and sensitive data. Once the POCs were established, a team was put together to assist them with their inventorying efforts. This team was comprised of CountyStat performance experts, the dataMontgomery project manager, a dataMontgomery project lead and the Chief Innovation Officer.

CountyStat hosted individual brainstorming sessions with each department, and sometimes individual divisions within larger departments, to draw out a list of dataset candidates. To facilitate the collection of dataset candidates, DTS created an online intake form for departments to submit the list that was developed based on the brainstorming sessions and subsequent internal work. This form yielded over 300 dataset submissions. A Gap Analysis and Risk-Level Assignment were given based on comparing submissions with department core function, systems, and performance measures. In the end, close to 600 datasets were submitted for consideration.

While all this work was occurring, the CInO planned and executed multiple external outreach events designed to gather feedback on datasets that members of the public felt should be published. With the assistance of DTS and CountyStat, the CInO held two Open Data Town Halls for residents and businesses. At these events residents could engage in conversations with County staff regarding the datasets and the potential ways they could put the data to use.

Once all of the datasets were submitted and the outreach events were held, the datasets were subject to a prioritization process. Every dataset's value was independently rated on twelve criteria, six "internal" and six "external," by CountyStat and CInO. Those criteria were:

Internal: Is the dataset aligned with the department's core function/Degree to which publishing this data furthers the core mission of the department? Is the dataset a direct or indirect source of a department's Headline Performance Measure(s) and/or Supporting Measure(s)? Will posting the data result in administrative time saved for a department(s)? (i.e. will they be able to stop spending time responding to requests for this particular information?) Is the data already collected and readily accessible so as not to require new or additional business processes? Is the data used across departments and does its

publication facilitate collaboration? Will publishing this dataset enable the retirement of a legacy system or database?

External: Is the data typically used when deciding policies that impact residents' quality of life? Will publishing this dataset allow a business or resident to perform a process more efficiently and/or effectively? Is Montgomery County the only source of the data? Does the data contribute to civic engagement? Does the data create economic opportunity? Will publishing this dataset make the department more accountable and/or responsive by improving/increasing the public's knowledge of its operation?

The score is as objective as possible, and the end result is a list that queues up the datasets in a manner that allows DTS to manage the pipeline and gets the highest value datasets published first. Based on the prioritization and resource availability, the datasets will be incorporated into an overall dataset implementation plan.

One of the drivers of this process was to be mindful of the time, effort, and money it requires to publish even a single dataset. By rating and ranking each dataset candidate on its individual merits, we could create a prioritized list so that datasets with the most value would be published first, and datasets with lower or questionable value – but still with a price tag – could be delayed or eliminated from consideration altogether. Addressing the issues up-front of whether a dataset would compromise any privacy law such as HIPPA, or present a public safety risk in any way ensures that we are not wasting resources publishing a dataset that would eventually have to get removed from the website.

The process of inventorying and prioritizing datasets did not add additional costs to the dataMontgomery initiative. By utilizing existing staff and internal talent we were able to provide value without exceeding staff time allotted for the initiative.

RESULTS AND OUTCOMES OF THE PROGRAM, AND LESSONS LEARNED

Montgomery County's Dataset Pipeline Strategy struck a balance between the needs of individual departments but kept the process centralized and focused. This systematic approach resulted in the identification of the best possible candidates for publication. This was accomplished while at the same time incorporating feedback from the public and creating a sense of ownership in the community. This was also done in a manner that respected the legal, privacy, and public safety considerations of potential datasets.

Beyond the immediate tactical success of the program, we've created a process that has brought our departments together to think about data. We've begun to establish a culture that values performance and understands that the data locked within their applications, spreadsheets and file cabinets belongs to our residents and holds value beyond our own internal use. This cannot help but foster a sense of transparency and accountability that we work so hard to achieve.

Investing time and effort in educating POCs has yielded many dataset opportunities. This data-minded community of staff across all our departments will live on long after the datasets are published. These POCs, with their deep knowledge of the frequent public information requests received and the data available within their Departments, will form the basis for a culture that values data ownership and data stewardship.

Centralizing the dataset submission list and requesting attribute information on each dataset has enabled the project team to minimize duplicative efforts and objectively prioritize datasets according to preset factors. This practice allows the County to focus resources on making the highest-value datasets available to the public.

We believe that as open data becomes more common and the accepted practice of governments, others can borrow and learn from our process, avoiding trial-and-error and other costs associated with uneven or widely decentralized implementation.