2018 Open Evanston Report

State of Open Data

Data supports the daily services staff provide to residents and informs policies that shape the future of Evanston. In 2017, the City Council passed a [resolution](#) approving an open data policy. Since its adoption, staff has put the policy’s principles into practice and worked to achieve its goals, one of which is providing an annual Open Data Report. This report fulfills that goal, providing a yearly snapshot of the City’s progress in sharing more datasets with the public and increasing collaboration and data sharing among staff.

Year in Review

Open Evanston

Residents and staff can visit Open Evanston ([openevanston.org](#)) to find data on all aspects of City operations. This open data portal allows both the non-technically proficient and tech savvy to download datasets, access the data through an application programming interface (API), and view and create visualizations. By the end of 2018, the portal housed more than 300 public datasets and had received more than 550,000 pageviews.

Some of the top datasets were [Building Permits](#), [Evanston Benchmarking Covered Building List](#), and [Evanston Arrests](#).
Tools like the [U.S. Open Data Census](https://opendata.civicxchange.org) and [What Works Cities](https://whatworkscities.org) certification are valuable benchmarks to compare how open Evanston is according to best practices and to other communities. The U.S. Open Data Census “is a crowdsourced measure of public access to public datasets in municipalities across the United States.” Evanston submitted data to the U.S. Open Data Census in 2017 and 2018. In 2017, Evanston was ranked 100 out of 129 communities. Today, it is ranked 23 out of 275. After applying for What Works Cities Certification in 2017, the City received an assessment to guide improvements and further success. The City is awaiting results of certification for 2018. This process will again provide a detailed assessment and access to resources and trainings that can target specific areas of need.

The open data portal is increasingly central to any project that involves data. In addition to being the City’s official warehouse of public data, it’s also a valuable training tool for staff to understand data analysis and a reliable data source for staff and community partners.

**Data Governance Team**

For the City’s data governance team, the open data portal is a starting point for ideas that flow across, between, and through departments. The team has met on a regular basis in 2018 and grown to include a representative from every department. The group has been pivotal in meeting the goals of the open data policy, including creation of an open data directory, discussion of privacy assessment for data publication, and development of a publication timeline. Team members regularly share how they use data daily and the challenges of introducing standards into existing processes.

Some notable team members’ accomplishments include:

- The Budget team implemented the Balancing Act Budget Simulator and published Priority-Based Budgeting cost and survey data.
- The Library began planning for data management and maintenance.
- The Fire Department enhanced their Formstack forms and the data collected from them. In cooperation with the IT and the Emergency Telecommunications Center, EFD implemented upgraded Pre-Incident Planning and EMS Emergency Patient Care Reporting (ePCR) system software.

In 2019, the team will focus on expanding best practices in data sharing to more staff members. The final section of this report will outline specific actions and projects.
Open Data Initiatives

Data team members influence their fellow department members to share data and provide feedback to open data administrators about the best ways to engage departments on projects to clean, extract, and analyze data. Two open data engagements in 2018, one external and one internal, illustrate how that process can work and serve as citywide models.

Police Data Dashboard Automation

In the summer of 2018, the City worked with Socrata, the vendor of Evanston’s open data platform, to automate five out of the 12 datasets used for the Police Dashboard. Automation of the datasets means that incident-level data is extracted, transformed, and loaded into Open Evanston on a daily basis. The remaining seven datasets are updated on a monthly basis. IT and Police Department staff collaborated in preparing and publishing the data. The team will continue to refine the data and contextual information and look for ways to use the data operationally.

Overall, the project not only ensured that these datasets were always updated, but also provided context and a deeper understanding of police operations for staff and residents. A broader impact is that the project empowered skilled staff to automate additional datasets without the need for assistance from Socrata.

Fire Data Analysis

Fire Chief Brian Scott approached the data governance team to request assistance with extracting, analyzing, and visualizing multiple sources of data. A small working group of Fire Department and IT staff created an inventory of existing data sources and uses, and discussed the questions and issues that data analysis could assist with.

With the assistance of Kenneth Xuan and Sylwia Koziana, Northwestern University work-study students, the group created a fire operations dashboard in Tableau and Google Data Studio. Both versions receive data updates as soon as the information is entered into Formstack forms and stored in Google Spreadsheets. We plan to use Google Data Studio as the visualization tool.
Moving forward, the group will continue to refine the internal fire operations dashboard and a number of additional projects are planned for 2019. These projects include:

- Integrating sources of community risk reduction data and creating a tool for analysis.
- Developing a training dashboard for visualization of training hours by individual firefighters.
- Researching and potentially developing a tool similar to FireSTATLA to show response times.

The data project team will meet regularly for checkins and discussion. This engagement demonstrates how to internally start the process of sorting through data and creating actionable insights.

**Next Steps**

2018 progress has laid the groundwork for continued success. Work will continue with the police and fire departments to deepen the existing data engagements. Other data projects will include:

- Data engagements for gathering equity data and training Evanston Public Library staff.
- Updating the City of Evanston’s open data inventory.
- Developing performance metrics to match budgeting needs.
● Researching/implementing an open finance system for improved year-round financial reporting and transparency.
● Improving tracking of building permit data and creating community development data reports for staff review.

The role of the data governance team is evolving as the need for data literacy increases in the organization. The team is considering the following tracks to focus on in 2019:

● Assist staff with data projects, including creating a data project playbook for distribution in 2019.
● Train staff in data gathering and analysis and how to use it in their work.
● Conduct targeted internal and external outreach, including development of a staff and community education academy similar to models in Denver, San Francisco, and Buffalo.
● Learn from other municipalities and civic technology organizations by attending and hosting data-themed events.

Overall, the team and the work of open data throughout the City will be more visible in 2019. Visible data is a powerful tool in creating and supporting an informed and engaged community. Engaged and informed residents and staff can develop data-driven services and policies that benefit all community members. A community engaged with data is one that is prepared for its future.