Accessing Data with FOIA

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Spencer Cowan, Amy Terpestra (Chicago), Noah Urban (Detroit), Steve Spiker, Sean Capperis (NYC)

Question: When do we give up on the nice relationship and resort to FOIA. Important question about what happens to the relationship

Spencer example: List of variables was proprietary and they did a FOIA question about the structure in order to know what they have and what to ask for

* Another Chicago example: Veritech – autotitle loan – data are property of IL dept. It is not always clear what is public data and what is not.

\*\* Spirit of FOIA – State, Federal, Local

Spike:

* We have taken a cascading approach to bring Open. Pushing for an open data ordinance… forcing cities to say that this is the default.
* The city should have an inventory on what we have and who can access it.
* Oakland has the most amazing FOIA system – can see what other people are asking.
* Research-only access, private-access

Kathy – should be an argument to run the govt efficiently – good business management practices. Rationalize data collection practice.

Spike – broader culture of openness – actual system – internal visibility – system helps to route the request. People don’t know what to access for who. Transparency about who has asked for

Code for America – product on how to track, see FOIA requests

Amy: Open Data does not equal transparency. Lots of data in Chicago – still lots to go

Spike: But Chicago has an expectation of openness, place to start.

Amy – used to have better relationships, but with state budget cuts. Serious capacity issue

Spike – inventory is a force to push for better staffing. Recognition of city inventory, impt of data. FOIA shows demand… There is a business need that is now explicit.

Spike – rent adjustment complaints on paper; Spike helps them digitize paper records, they are

Amy T: Had contact that was retiring, she tried to send flowers and they couldn’t accept them as illegal bribes.

KP – Need to update the data sharing guide - Full suite – full set of strategies – open data policy, inventory – FOIA legal people.

Noah U – when we are working to get state data, ask the city Land Bank to FOIA the data on your behalf.

As open data becomes more default, city agencies also benefit. Now have a public case. State agency is starting to recognize that we are a client too. Need access to our own information. Before more isolated, vs collectively pushing for policy/culture change. FOIA – investigative reporters might have tips, resources.

Oakland has journalists publish data through the Community Data Platform – they had connections, interests, alignment with civic hacker and journalists.

Sean – asking agencies to be more transparent

Oakland is saving $500K a year and more efficient. In Oakland, most agencies are centralized IT (not schools, HA, police).

Spike – requestors should have an option for people to publish the use – building a sharing piece to the system. Toggle - Can people contact you about this request?

Amy – open data more active at the city level. Factors will be different depending on level of government. Enlist national advocacy groups – Sunlight.

Sean – people in my ngh care about liquor licenses. People in ngh.

FOIA site - Records.oaklandnet.com. Compared to alameda county (can’t even find the process).

Cook County property transfer - $400 year – get an email.

Study in CA – lawsuits in county around parcel data. In 52 counties, not 1 county that was making more $ than it cost to do the service.s