

Western Pennsylvania Regional Data Center

Links for Other Cities

Updated 2023/09/19

Here are links for people in other cities interested in our regional approach to open data and community engagement. This is largely a sequential document - you'll find the older information at the top, and the newer materials at the bottom.

Here's a blog post describing why we designed the Regional Data Center the way we did

<http://www.wprdc.org/news/lessonslearned/>

We also designed a process to choose the technology for the open data portal. We did not start this conversation until we first figured-out the structure of the project. Leading with technology would have been a huge mistake, and it's important that you are clear about your approach with all stakeholders to get buy in and also give yourself a little breathing room with all of the direct and indirect pressure some of the vendors will try to put on you to choose their product. They will show shiny things to people on City Council and the next thing you know, you could have people try to influence your process from the outside. <http://www.wprdc.org/news/inside-our-data-portal-selection-process/>

A draft data management plan for the project can be found at this link.

<https://docs.google.com/document/d/10Qsr10Bj93ci6VLyrNa7DqTU9AJag6UYOA7j3taD6Ng/edit?usp=sharing>

It's important to put all of the data into context. We've drafted Data User Guides to provide context and ideas for other data users.

Our description of user guides: <http://www.wprdc.org/news/taking-data-documentation-up-to-11/>

Our first few guides were for some of our more-complex datasets

[Assessment user guide](#), [311 User guide](#)

We are also now using a "Lib Guide" format to put additional data into context. See them all here:

<https://tools.wprdc.org/guides/> University librarians are your go-to resource for this type of product.

We're now trying to turn this concept into a larger project in partnership with colleagues at Emerson

College and Georgia Tech. Our partners each wrote articles and developed resources for others looking

to create their own guides - <https://datajournalism.com/read/longreads/putting-data-back-into-context>

<https://serve-learn-sustain.gatech.edu/civic-data-guides-thinking-critically-about-digital-public-records>

Data User Groups have become our way to organize conversations with an ecosystem of data users. They provide us with a way to structure community engagement, and understand what types of data, tools, and programming our users and potential users need. It helps that we are seen as a neutral and trusted 3rd party intermediary, and that we are not trying to do this as part of a political agenda.

A description of the concept and recap from a few recent ones are listed below with a link.

Recap: <http://www.wprdc.org/news/introducing-data-user-group-meetings/>

Property data 2016: <http://www.wprdc.org/news/property-data-user-group-meeting-recap/>

Environmental Justice:

<http://www.wprdc.org/news/defining-environmental-justice-communities-in-allegheny-county-data-user-group-meeting-recap/>

Property/transportation data 2017:

<https://www.wprdc.org/news/transportation-and-property-data-user-group-meeting-recap-march-2017/>

Sunlight Foundation Blog:

<https://sunlightfoundation.com/2017/04/13/how-hosting-user-groups-for-open-data-helps-cities/>

Here's a blog post describing what we did as a result of the property user group meeting in 2016. We listen, then build tools and programs based on that feedback. We also prioritize data requests and cleanup on what people need. There are more descriptions of our user group meetings on our blog.

<http://www.wprdc.org/news/building-products-and-programs-on-user-feedback/>

In 2017, the Sunlight Foundation made Data User Groups the first in their Tactical Data Engagement Playbook <https://sunlightfoundation.com/2017/11/01/data-user-groups-our-first-tde-playbook/>

Here's our 2018 [property data user group meeting recap](#).

We're a partner in the National Neighborhood Indicators Partnership (NNIP)- As a community data intermediary, it's our primary community of practice. If your City has a partner, talk to them.

<http://www.neighborhoodindicators.org/>

Libraries are a huge partner of ours. In addition to our annual [data day event](#) (see page 7 in this pdf), we have partnered with the Carnegie Library on a data literacy series we call "Data 101." It's paper-based, as we realized that beginners in our classes were more likely to learn data literacy concepts if they weren't also needing to learn how to interact with software at the same time. We've designed four classes in all, and there is lots of interest from many to do more, and we offered classes to City and County staff. We also published a toolkit for Data 101 with the Carnegie Library so that other libraries (like the County Library system) may adopt it. We did a presentation and a guide for our "finding stories" class as part of the Cleveland NNIP meeting in September 2016.

Slideshow, with LEGOs:

<https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/1mHmlc5I-pV0AplKkUgu6pzBDAm3DU5-hz8L97Bg5m9Y/edit>

Materials from our "Finding Stories" Workshop:

<http://www.neighborhoodindicators.org/data-tech/course-catalog/data-101-data-visualization-data-literacy-and-storytelling>

More in the NNIP guide to training

<http://www.neighborhoodindicators.org/activities/projects/expanding-training-data-and-technology-improve-communities>

An October 2017 presentation on our all-paper Data 101 workshops.

https://www.neighborhoodindicators.org/sites/default/files/publications/Friday_Ignite_Tutt.pptx

The Data 101 Toolkit

<https://www.wprdc.org/news/data-101-toolkit/>

We wrote a blog post about Data Day for Living Cities in October 2017.

<https://www.livingcities.org/blog/1226-pittsburgh-s-data-day-using-civic-data-to-spark-hands-on-community-engagement>

We also regularly partner with the [Digital Scholarship Services](#) team at the University Library here at Pitt, and would be lost without the data management and digital humanities expertise. Every open data program should have a relationship with their academic library. We have partnered with our public and academic library and were awarded a grant from the Institute of Museum & Library Services (starting November 2017) to build a toolkit for librarians as data intermediaries, and begin forming a community of practice for librarians engaged in this work. <https://www.imls.gov/grants/awarded/lg-70-17-0146-17> Here's the [official project site](#) for Civic Switchboard.

Shannon Mattern of The New School covered our work in a recent post/article

<https://publicknowledge.sfmoma.org/local-codes-forms-of-spatial-knowledge/>

Here's a blog post the Civic Switchboard team drafted for libraries looking to host a civic data repository.

https://civic-switchboard.github.io/updates/post_14

Pittsburgh was a learning partner in a joint Code for America, NNIP, and Living Cities project, the "Civic Tech and Data Collaborative" <https://www.livingcities.org/work/civic-tech-and-data-collaborative>.

Through this collaborative, we convene the leaders of our civic tech organizations, civic and university librarians, and our City and County open data teams to discuss new project and event opportunities and organizational issues and processes such as onboarding new members and leadership development. One of the things that came out of our work here is our shared weekly [civic tech and open data newsletter](#).

We all meet monthly and try and use the space for collaboration between civic organizations. Here's [one of the outcomes of our engagement with civic tech student leaders at Carnegie Mellon](#).

NNIP has [written a helpful guide](#) for other cities looking to start a data intermediary.

Our big annual hackathon event in Pittsburgh was the Steel City Codefest - this effort ended in 2016. We were one of many partners behind the event. We paired civic tech participants with a nonprofit/government organization and ask them to work on a challenge we curated with the organization. Stipends were provided for teams that want to continue after the event. The format worked well, in that every year, two or three projects are actually finished and adopted by the organization. <http://steelcitycodefest.com/> We're also involved in smaller-scale events with our civic tech partners like Code for Pgh and Students for Urban Data Systems organized through the monthly civic tech roundtable. <http://www.wprdc.org/news/recruit-leaders-tackle-urban-civic-hacking/>

I also didn't cover governance here, but as an intermediary, we're able to facilitate a lot of cross-jurisdictional data conversations.

We also have a [performance management framework](#) and [dashboard](#) - we use the dashboard to share our performance stats, and we also regularly review them to learn more about the impact of our work. More on the technical aspects here:

<https://ckan.org/2017/09/19/do-you-know-how-your-open-data-is-being-used/>

ICYMI - our 2016 year in review blog post:

<http://www.wprdc.org/news/regional-data-center-2016-year-in-review/>

We also summarized 2017: <http://www.wprdc.org/news/2017-year-review/>

In August, 2017, we released a new redesigned website. Details in a blog post

<http://www.wprdc.org/news/designed-new-website/>

We wrapped-up our plan for long-term project sustainability in the first half of 2019. Our initial startup funding ran out in 2019, and we hired a consultant that helped us with an overall plan and strategy. Please contact us (www.wprdc.org) if you'd like to see a copy of the plan. People have told us that we should be the ones to figure out what we need in terms of capacity, and the consultant helped us frame it for potential funders. Four questions we are thinking about related to this:

1. How can we provide services to communities outside the City and County, or publishers in the City & County that we don't yet know? What services and support do publishers need? How do we provide a strong value proposition (we want their data to be used)? Who handles community engagement if we don't know the community?
2. How do we build and structure our team of developers to build tools in a more productive fashion? What can we learn from projects like the NYC Planning Labs, NY Public Library Labs, the and other agile product development shops.
3. How do we provide technical assistance services to the community in a structured way? How can we use students in this work as much as possible? What will it take to manage students well & provide them with a good experience?
4. What should we be thinking about now regarding sensor/"smart city" data? What infrastructure will be needed, and what does it cost? What is our overall philosophy? What about governance, privacy, and consent?

We held a Webinar with Open Knowledge International early in 2018 - here's the recording.

<https://discuss.okfn.org/t/us-open-knowledge-network-and-wprdc-overview/6340/3>

Here are our thoughts in how a data intermediary might support broader community engagement efforts around the 2020 Census. <https://www.wprdc.org/news/nnip-recap-census-2020-thoughts/>

We covered our approach to privacy in a presentation at the 2019 Personal Digital Archiving conference. In this presentation, we discussed our "privacy roundtables" which allow us to structure a privacy conversation about open data

https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/1W0CxvKrSbPH5yk1cJ2j7djiyv-GQT_QJiDlxHIG8-sE/edit?usp=s_haring

We collaborated with the Allegheny Land Trust to build the Urban Greenprint tool that supports their urban land conservation efforts. [Read more about it](#), or just [check out the tool](#). We also built [Leaducated.com](#) for Dr. Michael Blackhurst, our colleague here at UCSUR. The tool enables people to see if they have a lead water service line. This was our first foray into mobile development.

In Summer 2019, we wrapped up a big project with the Pittsburgh Parking Authority, assembling parking data for all surface lots and on-street meter zones. See more details about how we set-up the data feed in our [blog post](#), and check out our [parking data dashboard](#), which visualizes all of the data.

We've been very involved in the work of the Black Equity Coalition during the COVID-19 pandemic. Here's a summary of what we and other members of the data committee have been working on. <https://www.neighborhoodindicators.org/library/stories/black-equity-coalition-deploys-data-reduce-covid-19%E2%80%99s-impact-black> - The collaboration was recognized by NNIP through the 2021 G. Thomas Kingsley Impact Award <https://www.neighborhoodindicators.org/partners/nnip-awards#:~:text=NNIP%20conferred%20the%202020%20G,and%20sex%20trafficking%20in%20Oakland.>

Our project also was written-up in Kaiser health News <https://khn.org/news/article/data-science-proved-what-pittsburghs-black-leaders-knew-racial-disparities-compound-covid-risk/>

And the BEC was awarded a \$20,000 prize from the U.S. Census Bureau's [Opportunity Project Prize Challenge](#)

On the topic of data and power...

We have been reading a lot on the topic of data, power, trust, justice, governance, and equity. Most of these are non-academic reports.

- Collaborative Governance in Theory and Practice (Ansell & Gash)
<https://sites.duke.edu/niou/files/2011/05/Ansell-and-Gash-Collaborative-Governance-in-Theory-and-Practice.pdf>
- Reimagining Data and Power:
<https://www.data4sdgs.org/reimagining-data-and-power-roadmap-putting-values-heart-data>
- Participatory Data Stewardship:
<https://www.adalovelaceinstitute.org/report/participatory-data-stewardship/>

- Civic Participation in the Datafied Society
https://datajusticelab.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/CivicParticipation_DataJusticeLab_Report2022.pdf
- Data Commons Primer:
<https://openfuture.eu/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/220723data-commons-primer.pdf>
- A primer on community power, place, and structural change:
https://dornsife.usc.edu/assets/sites/1411/docs/Primer_on_Structural_Change_web_lead_local.pdf
- A Toolkit for Centering Racial Equity Throughout Data Integration
<https://aisp.upenn.edu/resource-article/a-toolkit-for-centering-racial-equity-throughout-data-integration/>
- Rising Equitable Community Data Ecosystems (RECoDE) <https://data.org/reports/recode-report/>
- Four Lessons for Advancing Racial Equity through Place-Based Initiatives:
<https://www.urban.org/urban-wire/four-lessons-advancing-racial-equity-through-place-based-initiatives>
- Leveraging Community Information Exchanges for Equitable and Inclusive Data:
<https://ciesandiego.org/data-equity/>
- Why am I Always Being Researched: <https://chicagobeyond.org/researchequity/>
- NNIP's Goals to Improve Use of Data in Advancing Racial Equity:
<https://www.neighborhoodindicators.org/nnips-goals-improve-use-data-advancing-racial-equity>
- Envisioning a New Future: Building Trust for Data Use:
<https://www.urban.org/research/publication/envisioning-new-future-building-trust-data-use>
- Artificial intelligence in the city: Building civic engagement and public trust:
<https://www.mcgill.ca/centre-montreal/projects/completed-projects/ai-city>
- Do No Harm Guide: Applying Equity Awareness in Data Visualization
<https://www.urban.org/research/publication/do-no-harm-guide-applying-equity-awareness-data-visualization>

We're starting a new initiative in the fall of 2023 - as a partner of the Black Equity Coalition here's some text copied from an email promoting our opening for a program director

We're part of a committed team bringing participatory data governance to the City of Pittsburgh. The Black Equity Coalition (BEC) recently received a grant from the de Beaumont Foundation's Modernized Anti-Racist Data Ecosystems (MADE) funding program to establish a promising partnership with the City.

The goal of the Data Justice for Pittsburgh's Black Neighborhoods initiative is to ensure that members of the Black community have a meaningful participatory role in the design of public data systems. The project will also help residents in Black communities that have been harmed by residential segregation and disinvestment in the City of Pittsburgh gain tools to improve the quality of housing and the built environment.

You can read more about what's being planned in press releases from the [City of Pittsburgh](#), [Black Equity Coalition](#), and on the [de Beaumont Foundation's website](#).

The team from the BEC's Data Justice Working Group leading this project is now looking for a Data Justice Project Director. I'd appreciate it if you could help us spread the word about this transformational career opportunity. The person hired will to help establish the infrastructure enabling Pittsburgh residents to gain power in the decisions the City makes about data. The position is located with our partners at the UrbanKind Institute.

· **Details and link to apply:**
<https://urbankind-institute.careerplug.com/jobs/2140062/apps/new>

We also launched a **data literacy workshop series** for data stewards that touches on topics of power and data: [Data Literacy for Data Stewards recruitment.docx](#)

We've been capturing the outputs as blog posts published beginning in October 2022:
<https://www.wprdc.org/category/news/>

A second data literacy series works with community ambassadors, and we're also working at the intersection of data and art. Here's a brief description of the 2023 series
<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1wYnQUL5m9ZwBMyUQf2wL4Z9rT6HI6YmZL2uVj-Q9wIM/edit?usp=sharing>

Affordable Housing - HouseCAT

Our housing work also resulted in the release of housecat, a new product to explore data on subsidized properties - download slides from a recent presentation at this link:
https://www.neighborhoodindicators.org/sites/default/files/publications/10_26_22%20Pittsburgh%20SHowcase%20Slides.pptx

People can apply for access here: <https://www.housecatpgh.org/accounts/request>

In 2023, we completed work on a NSF grant “Pathways to Enable Open Source Ecosystems - we developed a plan to strengthen the CKAN open source open data software ecosystem. We were fortunate to be able to build relationships within the ecosystem - see more about what we did on the project website. <https://civicdataecosystem.org/>