Civic Hackers Open Up City Budget
Code4Sac Releases Sacramento Budget Data

- Sacramento's city budget data is locked away in a PDF
- Code4Sac, a civic-minded group of programmers, has made that data easily accessible on their website: www.code4sac.org
- Now citizens, activists, researchers and journalists can analyze the budget themselves

Sacramento, CA -- Sacramento's budget is free! Code4Sac, Sacramento's local Code for America brigade, announced today that 2012-13 City of Sacramento budget data is freely available on their website for anyone to download and use.

Until now, the city has only released its budget online in a PDF format, which was cumbersome for anyone interested in doing further analysis. Using the data required combing through an over-200-page document and manually copying the numbers you were interested in.

"We've taken a document that a human can read and pulled out the numbers so that a computer can read them," said Jay Venti, a Code4Sac volunteer.

Putting the budget numbers in a "machine-readable" format lets anyone create their own spreadsheets, databases, charts, and graphs. For example, a transportation advocate can track road improvement expenditures; a concerned citizen can compare staffing levels among different city departments; or a researcher can easily compare Sacramento's budget to those of other local governments.

Code4Sac volunteers have already built a number of interactive charts from the data, all available at http://code4sac.org/city-of-sacramento-open-budget-project/. These graphics visualize the budget, breaking it down by department to show how the city spends its money. For example, the police and fire departments spend the vast majority of the city's General Fund (74 percent), but General Fund expenditures only make up 47 percent of the city's budget, with the rest coming from enterprise, internal service, and other funds. And there are many more trends and relationships to uncover.

"A project like this demonstrates the value of getting to the 'next level' of openness with government information, in which the information is not just shown to the citizens, but also entrusted to them to do with as they wish. Participatory democracy is enhanced when the citizens have the tools to explore and understand the workings of government," said Code4Sac volunteer Joel Riphagen.

The City of Sacramento has made great strides in opening up its data in recent years. A number of useful datasets are freely available on the city's Open Data Portal at http://data.cityofsacramento.org/, and Sacramento was recently rated the second most open city in the US City Open Data Census conducted by the Open Knowledge Foundation. Code4Sac and the city's information technology staff have worked together to find ways to use other city data sources, such as the locations of parking spaces and fruit trees in the city.

Code4Sac expects that the city will continue its progress in this area by releasing data from its most recent budget on its Open Data Portal directly, removing the need for an outside entity to pull information out of a PDF to make it machine-readable. A direct release by the city could also include much more detail than the Code4Sac effort, which was limited to the summary budgets of individual city departments.

The budget data released by Code4Sac, along with some sample visualizations, is available at http://code4sac.org/city-of-sacramento-open-budget-project/.

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Code4Sac strives to fulfill the mission of Code for America, helping residents and governments harness technology to solve community problems. As a local Code for America Brigade, Code4Sac's purpose is to deploy, maintain, and sustain civic technology and open data infrastructure for the Sacramento region. Code4Sac believes the best way to meet its goals is to work in partnership with government agencies, and it hopes to inspire community members to interact with government in new and rewarding ways. The City of Sacramento is Code4Sac's local government sponsor, and Code4Sac has received valuable support from Councilmember Steve Hansen. Code4Sac meets regularly at the Hacker Lab at 1715 I Street in Sacramento.