

Western Pennsylvania Regional Data Center

Published On: 03 April 2017

Organisation: City of Pittsburgh, Department of Innovation & Performance

Country: United States

Level of government: Local government

Sector: General public services

Type: Data, Digital, Partnerships

Launched in: 2015

Link to the innovation's website

Like this innovation

0 persons like this innovation

Description

The Western Pennsylvania Regional Data Center (WPRDC) provides a shared technological and legal infrastructure to support research, analysis, decision making, and community engagement. It was created in 2015 through the partnership of the City of Pittsburgh, Allegheny County, and the University of Pittsburgh. The WPRDC supports community initiatives by making public information easier to use. There are currently 132 datasets available on the WPRDC's website.

Open data was not a priority before the creation of the WPRDC. Data was isolated, generally in the department of origin, and difficult to find, use, analyze, and apply. In 2014, the first open data legislation was created in Pittsburgh. This spurred the development of the WPRDC. Currently, the WPRDC is home to 132 data sets, with a substantial amount of data currently being prepared for deployment. The Western Pennsylvania Regional Data Center is unique due to the collaborative nature of the project. While cities across the globe engage in open data projects, the WPRDC is a unique local government solution due to the data not being from only one source. Data sets available are source from the City of Pittsburgh, Allegheny County, the Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh, and several nonprofit organizations. The collaborative nature of the WPRDC allows the organization to leverage skill sets from data professionals across all the organizations involved in the project.

Why the innovation was developed

- Before the implementation of the Western Pennsylvania Regional Data Center, public data was not widely available to residents or researchers
 - This general lack of transparency led members of City leadership to become proponents of open data legislation. The manifestation of this policy is the WPRDC.
-

Objectives

Enhance public trust, Enhance transparency, Improve access, Improve effectiveness, Improve efficiency, Improve service quality, Increase citizen engagement

Main beneficiaries

Academia, Businesses, Civil Society, General population, Government bodies, Government staff, Low-income groups, Students, Young people

Results

Effectiveness

- The data that is made available by the WPRDC has been applied by users outside of the City and County framework to develop applications to improve communities.
 - Lots to Love is a n application built by GTECH Strategies, in concert with the City of Pittsburgh and the Pittsburgh Greenspace Alliance. This site, using data provided by the WPRDC, is an interactive guide for community organizers and residents interested in transforming vacant lots back to productive use. The application allows users to see vacant lots throughout Pittsburgh and see how others have improved previously vacant lots.
-

Service quality

Accessibility:

- The WPRDC provides a centralized space for City and County data.
 - At one time, if residents were interested in public data, they would have to fill out a Right-to-Know request. This was time consuming and very rarely produced appropriate responses.
 - The WPRDC nullifies this problem by allowing the public access to a wide swath of data sets. This data ranges from code enforcement data to the energy consumption of publicly owned facilities.
-

User satisfaction

- The procedure for obtaining data from the City of Pittsburgh or Allegheny County was, at one point, not entirely clear as well as cumbersome.
- With the implementation of the WPRDC, residents can browse 132 data sets and counting by accessing one webpage. The ease of which public data is now available is also a boon to those in the region involved in research.
- Pittsburgh is home to several renowned universities that engage in research that would require data collected by the public sector. The WPRDC makes it quite easy for researchers to access the data that they require.

Development

Design

The City of Pittsburgh's open data legislation was the primary catalyst for the implementation of the Western Pennsylvania Regional Data Center. The idea for the open data legislation to be manifested as the WPRDC came from the City of Pittsburgh and Allegheny County's commitment to ensuring residents throughout the region had access to relevant data sets. The innovative nature of the WPRDC was spearheaded by City council members, City and County administration, and data professionals in both organizations.

Testing

- The WPRDC is an evolution of the Pittsburgh Neighborhood and Community Information System (PNCIS), administered by the University Center for Social and Urban Research (UCSUR).
 - PNCIS assisted community groups in compiling relevant data, such as property information. The WPRDC relies on the capacity built by PNCIS to leverage relationships and partnerships developed during that initial time period.
-

Implementation

Tools used:

- .

Resources used:

- .
-

Partnerships

Multiple partners

Academics and Research Bodies, Other Public Sector

The Western Pennsylvania Regional Data Center (WPRDC) is a collaborative effort, with partners including the City of Pittsburgh, Allegheny County, the Richard King Mellon Foundation, and the University of Pittsburgh.

All of the partners involved in the WPRDC bring a unique skill set that promotes the data center and builds capacity for the future. The University of Pittsburgh helps to fund and administer the WPRDC. Pitt's Library System Digital Scholarship Services provide support in the areas of data management and metadata. Staff from the City of Pittsburgh and Allegheny County help to provide the data and establish pipelines so that all data sets are updated in real time. the success of the WPRDC would not be possible without the continued collaboration of all partners.

Lessons Learned

Lessons Learned

- A regional data center is only able to thrive when many actors are working in concert.
 - The WPRDC would not be nearly as successful if the collaborative element was not active. Buy-in from the two most influential public agencies in the region, the City of Pittsburgh and Allegheny County, creates a symbiotic environment that is conducive for continued growth of the WPRDC.
 - The administrative element, provided by the University of Pittsburgh, allows the WPRDC to be staffed by well-trained data scientists, who in turn use their expertise to work with staff from the city and county.
-

Conditions for success

- The primary catalyst for the development of the WPRDC was the open data legislation passed in the City of Pittsburgh in 2014. The legislation made way for the data collaboration between the City of Pittsburgh and Allegheny County, which led to the development of the WPRDC.
 - In relation to the open data policy, the leadership provided by prominent members of the City and County organization has made the creation of further data pipelines more efficient. The support of City and County leadership makes the growth of the WPRDC a priority.
 - The expertise of the all staff members involved in the innovation makes the WPRDC successful. Staff members are committed to the growth of the project and therefore are willing to work and learn new skills in order to make the project a success.
-

Other information

The collaborative nature of the WPRDC provides a robust framework for replication among local governments. Both the City of Pittsburgh and Allegheny County work in concert to create data pipelines to make data sets available for public consumption. Therefore, the product is a combination of the strengths of both local governments and is aided by the skills provided by those employed at the WPRDC. The collaborative model illustrated by the success of the WPRDC can and should be replicated by other public and nonprofit agencies.

Copyright OECD. All rights reserved.