

Citizens, Federal Employees Support Open Data Plans

Despite widespread backing, agencies say they need more technological and leadership support to achieve government transparency goals, finds Socrata survey.

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A recent study shows broad support for the federal government's open data initiative from both citizens and federal employees, but agencies say they need better technology and more leadership support to fully realize their goals for data transparency.

The [2010 Open Data Benchmark Study](#) from Socrata found that 68% of U.S. citizens and 93% of federal employees are behind the data transparency aspect of the Obama administration's Open Government Directive. Moreover, citizens 3-to-1 would support a candidate for public office who also backed the move to open data, according to the survey.

Agencies are slowly moving to make government data available to the public, with 48.1% of them already publishing data in some way, according to the survey. However, Socrata's research also demonstrates a need for more technological help to make data accessible to the public.

A full 63% of government stakeholders said they need better data extraction, transformation, and loading tools, while 57% request visualization tools for charting and mapping data, the survey found. Data export tools for multi-format downloads were requested by 53% of those surveyed, while 50% asked for common APIs across datasets.

Developers building Web tools to share data also said they need help to use government data more efficiently. A total of 56% said they want more access to relevant data, while 50% requested open APIs to access data and metadata. Agencies also could do more to improve the quality of data, as 46.7% of developers cited better data quality as one of their most pressing needs.

Agencies face other obstacles to achieving data transparency as well. A lack of political will or leadership was cited by 27% of government respondents as a roadblock to open data, while lack of funding (19%), and privacy and security concerns (16.5%) also are tripping up efforts, the survey found.

In the meantime, agencies are meandering toward open data, according to the survey. A centralized open data site has been established by 23.8% of government organizations, and 24.3% are publishing some data within different groups within the organization or on different sections or pages of their websites. Still, 26.6% are planning how they will open their data, while 16.8% said they currently have no plans for an open data site.

Socrata leveraged the results of three surveys conducted between August and October 2010 to compile the benchmark study. One study polled 1,000 adults in the United States; another asked questions of 300 self-identified government employees; and the third was conducted with support from Gov 2.0 advocacy groups such as the Sunlight Foundation and the Personal Democracy Forum.