DATA-AS-A-UTILITY:
a new era for the public sector

Industry Perspective

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Imagine, if you can, that the town you live in is suddenly deprived of water or electricity. It's easy to picture the chaos that might ensue — people would not be able to clean, cook or do many of the things they expect to do on a daily basis, including accessing the Internet and watering their lawns. Businesses would shut down. Schools would close. The public would be angry — and rightfully so — at the government for letting access to these resources lapse.

Such a situation would be unlikely, primarily because most governments work hard to prevent it. Access to natural resources and utilities provides the basis of several of government's most important goals: quality of life, operational excellence and economic impact.

In fact, the public sector's success depends on its ability to provide the populace with easy access to these resources, and it's built complex infrastructures around them and the public's ability to retrieve them. A town without a public works department providing water, gas, electricity, sanitation services or general maintenance? Impossible.

It's common to think of raw, natural materials such as water, gas and lumber as utilities that must be provided to the public in a reliable, organized and easy-to-access manner. But in the 21st century, there is one more utility we must add to that list of resources. **And that utility is data.**

You may not necessarily think of data as a utility. It's not as easy to see streams of data directly in front of you as it is to see the water in the Hoover Dam or the telephone lines running across your neighborhood skyline.

But consider the similarities: A resource such as gas or electricity is not something consumers necessarily think much about until it is delivered to an endpoint at their house and accessed with a flip of a light switch or a turn of a faucet. And whether you understand it or not, it is increasingly becoming the same way with data. Consumers want to get services on their mobile devices and convert those services into something useful. They may not think about data in specifics — the ones and zeros — or how it gets to them, but they understand the power behind it. They also know that when it is delivered in an accessible format, like water through a faucet, they then can do something useful with it.

The fact is, data is as important today as any resource that you access on a day-to-day basis. It solves problems, helps you make smarter investments, and increases transparency and trust. And consumers are clamoring for more of it, expecting to be able to access it whenever they want, however they want.

It is the government's responsibility to use the asset of data to drive better decisions, provide innovative services and enable fact-based decision-making in ways that will fundamentally transform 21st-century society.

That's why GovLoop has partnered with Socrata, an industry leader in cloud solutions for open data and data-driven governments, to write this industry perspective.

Socrata believes firmly that the public sector must treat data today as more than an afterthought or a "nice to have" piece of information. In order to improve quality of life and services to their citizens, governments must treat data as a resource, just like they would water or electricity. They must provide an infrastructure around it and make it accessible to the public.

In short, today is the era of data-as-a-utility, and it is time for the public sector to act.

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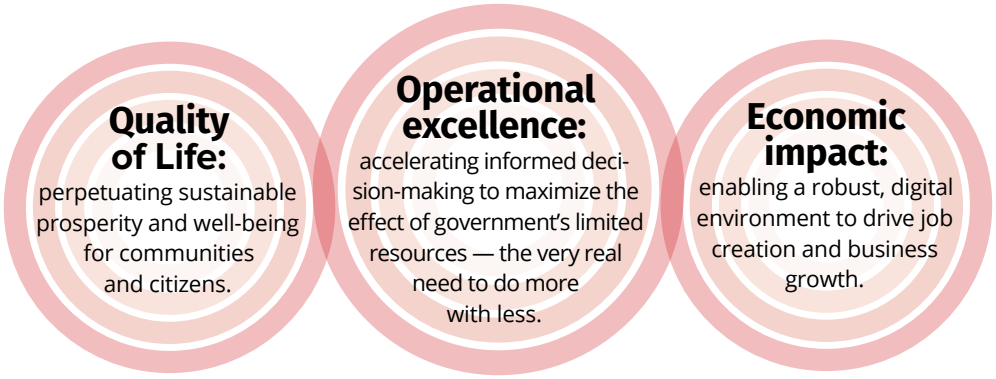
A Platform for 21st-Century Goals & 21st-Century Government

Every level of government has common goals. They include:



Governments share another commonality: finding new ways to deliver on these goals as budgets decrease and citizen expectations increase. Fortunately, data is a potential game changer for achieving these goals.

Public data, particularly when treated as a utility, can impact all of these governmental objectives. In fact, harnessing data-as-a-utility is unquestionably one of the biggest opportunities the public sector has ever had, said Kevin Merritt, Socrata's Chief Executive Officer and Founder.

"If you think about governments over the years," Merritt pointed out, "they have turned water into a utility, have turned electricity into a utility, have turned transportation into a utility. Now what's expected of them is to take this new natural resource — data — and turn it into the fuel for the economy of the next generation."

"The age of data-as-a-utility has arrived in the public sector, and it's the long-awaited synthesis of a wide variety of government data programs and services, including open data, big data and internal data sharing," Merritt added.

To make good on the promise of data-as-a-utility, though, governments must work to create an infrastructure to access, display and analyze this data that is exceedingly easy to use and consumer-friendly.

That's where Socrata comes in with its recently released Data-as-a-Utility™ (DaaU) platform. Designed in collaboration with hundreds of leading public-sector organizations worldwide, the Socrata Data-as-a-Utility platform combines breakthrough software innovations with deep public-sector expertise and proven methodology to empower governments to capitalize on the tremendous power of their data for a new generation of digital projects, programs and services.

The platform is a cloud-based, Software-as-a-Service (SaaS) product suite consisting of the essential tools and components for capturing, organizing, storing, curating, delivering and presenting government data of all types — open, closed, public and private — in the format and user experience most relevant to target constituencies and stakeholders, which include external citizens and communities of interest as well as internal employees, advocacy groups, media and content producers, professional developers, scientists, and statisticians.

A platform for organizing and offering your data is more important than ever. Merritt explained that this is because citizens are at a point where they expect to access public data from their governments in the same manner that they might access something from Apple, Amazon or any other company.

"The world is digital now," he said. "Individuals today, they expect their entire world to be data-driven. The expectation now is exactly the same for government to transform themselves from analog, stand-in-line governments to digital 24/7, ubiquitously available governments."

The public wants data that's accessible not only to analysts, researchers and specialized developers, but to anyone looking to answer a question or gain insight into government, Merritt added.

This means rich, interactive applications and user interfaces that use text, graphics, maps and visualizations to accelerate and inform the daily decisions of government employees and diverse constituencies.

When combined with a powerful but intuitive platform, data can unlock economic value, increase transparency and help government provide better services.

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- Kevin Merrit, CEO & Founder of Socrata

Just the Facts: What Data-as-a-Utility Can Do for the Public Sector

As mentioned, governments today have three major common goals:
Quality of life, economic impact, & operational excellence.
Data, when treated and applied as a utility, helps achieve each of these goals.

Let's see how:

Quality of Life

861k

Montgomery County, Md., created a redesigned open annual budget dashboard that received 861k page views last year, with more engaged constituents and media.

71%

Edmonton created a dashboard to track pothole maintenance progress and reduced citizen complaints by 71%.

150k

Institute of Museum and Library Services aggregated survey data that is easy to access and search, resulting in 150K page views in first 6 months.

Operational Excellence

$3m

Massachusetts went digital and saved $3 million in paper, postage and printing costs.

$46m

Montgomery County, Md., reduced overtime expenses by more than $46 million.

$20m

California saved more than $20 million by optimizing the state's vehicle fleet.

Economic Impact

$221b

The United States has created $221 billion in revenue generated by private firms using federal government data.

4,000

Open weather data in the United States has created 400 companies and employs 4,000 people.

$1m

San Francisco saved more than $1 million per year by allowing access to real-time transit data.

Ultimately, collecting and consolidating key data enables a data-driven decision-making process that's impactful and transparent, while giving citizens access to previously scattered and inaccessible data through a platform that can help make their communities a better place to live.

CONCLUSION

Now is the time to put public data to work in order to address big government issues such as the environment, public safety, health care, transparency and job creation. But this can only be done if data is treated as a utility that every citizen has a right to access in a way that is easy, intuitive, open and impactful. This means that governments owe it to their citizens to build a usable, consumer-friendly infrastructure to access this raw data and digital information.

When done correctly, data-as-a-utility will enable dramatically improved outcomes in quality of life, economic impact and operational excellence. Soon, you can expect to see governments of all sizes using data and raw digital material to create economic prosperity for the people they serve, to create safer, more livable cities, and to create a better quality of life for everybody. Additionally, data, when served up as a utility, will maximize public funds and resources while delivering a rapid return on investment.

"Data-as-a-utility is clearly one of the biggest opportunities for government in the 21st century," Merritt concluded. "Data is that next natural resource. Data is this vital, raw public asset that government has in abundance, and now they're transforming it into data-as-a-utility. It's abundantly clear to us at Socrata, by virtue of working with some of the most innovative public organizations in the world, that it's no longer a question of if, it's a question of when and how. Every public institution will capitalize on public data as the basis for 21st-century digital government. Socrata believes that unleashing the power of government data has the opportunity to improve the world around us. We're really here to help transform the world."

"Ultimately, we want our data to make a real difference for governments and their citizens, and to have a true impact on their lives."

- Kevin Merrit
CEO & Founder of Socrata

About Socrata

Socrata is the global leader in software solutions that are designed exclusively for digital government. Socrata's cloud-based, SaaS solutions, supported by the Socrata Open Data Network and Socrata Partner Ecosystem, deliver unprecedented data-driven innovation and cost savings for hundreds of public-sector leaders and millions of their constituents worldwide.

About GovLoop

GovLoop's mission is to "connect government to improve government." We aim to inspire public-sector professionals by serving as the knowledge network for government. GovLoop connects more than 200,000 members, fostering cross-government collaboration, solving common problems and advancing government careers.

GovLoop is headquartered in Washington, D.C., with a team of dedicated professionals who share a commitment to connect and improve government. For more information about this report, please reach out to Catherine Andrews, GovLoop Director of Content, at Catherine@govloop.com.

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