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5 Ways to Jumpstart the Release of Open Data on Policing

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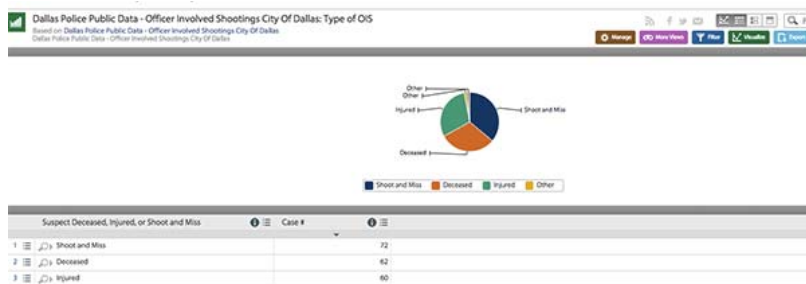SHARE   Tweet ‹ 76   Share ‹ 31

The President's Task Force made **several recommendations
[HTTP://WWW.COPS.USDOJ.GOV/PDF/TASKFORCE/Interim_TF_Report.pdf]** advising more
robust use of data and technology to increase transparency and police effectiveness in
identifying use of forces challenges. In parallel, law enforcement agencies across the country
are beginning to use data and technology to increase transparency, with the aim of improving
policing and communications strategies and fostering community trust. The path to open data
(**structured, machine-readable, and incident-level
[HTTPS://WWW.CODEFORAMERICA.ORG/GOVERNMENTS/PRINCIPLES/OPEN-DATA/]**) isn't yet
well-charted, and as a result, the privacy, technology, and political considerations can initially
seem daunting.

Often, the best way to begin an open data initiative is by delivering quick, low-risk wins to
your stakeholders. Here are five ways jumpstart your police open data initiative:

1. **Start with data you've already released in a non-open format** (e.g., a PDF or table
   on a web site). Taking this approach, you can quickly realize the value of open data with
   records that are already public. For example, maybe you have PDF documents or
   spreadsheets of shooting incidents or officer-involved-shootings on your agency web site.
   If you move that data over to your city or county's open data portal, it will be
   immediately easier for the public to download, sort, and analyze, resulting in greater
   awareness and understanding.

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Denice Ross

@denicewross
[http://www.twitter.com/denice

Denice Ross is a Presidential Innovatio
co-organizing the Police Data Initiative
the White House Domestic Policy Coun
Office of Science Technology Policy. Sh
comes most recently from the City of I
Orleans government, where she launch
data.nola.gov, after ten years of
democratizing data with the nonprofit
New Orleans Community Data Center.

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content/uploads/2015/05/dallas-police-data.jpg]

Dallas turned their officer-involved-shooting data from HTML tables into open, machine readable, structured data in Socrata.

2. **Publish the incident-level data used in public CompStat meetings or accountability reports**, as those reports provide instant context, mitigating concerns about the data being misinterpreted. An analyst probably had to work with the data to get it into the slide deck or report, and perhaps they could just add publishing the incident-level data to their workflow.
3. **Open up historical data sets** while you work out the technical and staffing requirements for more real-time data release. Also, by publishing the historical data, public dialogue that results from the data release can be more productive because you'll be able to discuss changes over time.
4. **Remove attributes that are major sticking points** that will slow down your publishing. For example, if you aren't sure how (either from a staffing or technological perspective) you'll redact free text comments from a data set, consider releasing the data set without that tricky attribute for this first pass. You can always go back to the data set when you have the means and buy-in to address the issue. Also, you may get useful feedback from the public that could help make the case for additional resources to release more attributes.
5. **Join the growing community of open data in policing practice** to connect with other agencies and experts who have been opening up data and can provide peer-to-peer support. Many of the questions you and others in your agency may have are questions that have very likely been encountered and answered effectively by others. If you are interested, **fill out this survey [https://docs.google.com/forms/d/1R832Gu3iAlAvPGU_O2gBC538qad-ZIIwgy5Ew-J4CfM/viewform]** to connect with ongoing work at Code for America and The Police Foundation.

About the Authors:

Denice Ross is a Presidential Innovation Fellow co-organizing the Police Data Initiative with the White House Domestic Policy Council and Office of Science Technology Policy. She comes most recently from the City of New Orleans government, where she launched data.nola.gov, after ten years of democratizing data with the nonprofit Greater New Orleans Community Data Center.

Jim Burch is Vice President for Strategic Initiatives at the Police Foundation, a national, non-profit organization dedicated to improving policing through science and innovation. He recently departed federal service after 20+ years with the U.S. Department of Justice, having served as an Assistant Director at the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF) and as Deputy Assistant Attorney General at the Office of Justice Programs (OJP), where he provided leadership for DOJ's open data initiatives. Follow him on Twitter @JimHBurch.

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