Data Feeds: Democratization of Government Data  
*City of Washington, DC*

2009 Innovations in American Government Awards Preliminary Application

**Essays:**

1. Please provide a two sentence summary of the innovation. This description should accurately and succinctly convey the innovation and its importance. (maximum 45 words)
   
The District of Columbia government organizes and catalogs its 216 live data feeds and makes them available to the general public by shifting power from a few government officials with access to public data to “we the people.”

2. Describe the program or initiative. What problem(s) does your program or initiative address? What is the innovation? Please emphasize the results your program or initiative has achieved. (maximum 500 words)
   
**Program/Initiative Description**

In an effort to promote transparency in government and provide better service to District residents, DC’s Office of the Chief Technology (OCTO) created a digital public square to provide information through live feeds that stream data listing crime incidents, building permits and juvenile arrests.

**The Problem**

Historically, the district government was not known for its transparency, effectiveness or services during a decade of corruption, fiscal crisis and mismanagement. With 413,233 calls and 62,588 emails annually, residents and business owners make permit and service related requests which result in over 200 million documents to process. A growing need to access this data became evident to ensure transparency in government operations and real-time access to information by constituents.

**The Innovation**

OCTO deployed Real Simple Syndication (RSS) feeds on the District government’s website, dc.gov. DC then became the first and only government entity to publish data in a variety of formats at such a large volume, which ultimately made an impact on the government’s ability to engage its 588,292 residents.

By October 2007, DC began offering more than 200 datasets through its live catalogue and data feeds website, http://data.octo.dc.gov. Visitors can find real-time information on crime incidents by date, time of day, ward, block or type. The site also provides details on construction projects by location, type of construction, budget, completion date or status. Data on registered vacant properties is available by ward, address, owner or tax assessment.

**Results Achieved**

The success of this initiative is evident by the national recognition the site has received for its
presentation and accessibility. Most recently, the District’s CapStat website (which uses these data feeds) was featured as one of the top 10 Great .gov Websites by Government Computer News Magazine (GCN).

Katie Filbert of the National Institute of Justice published a crime research paper using OCTO’s data and commented, “the data is a great resource for people to be informed as to what is going on, and it is helpful that there is a historical perspective with data going back quite some time.”

DC allows anyone with Internet access to view or download crime data and maps, public space permits and building applications and service requests information. One user replied, “I’ve been speaking to some police departments out in California, and what you are doing is light years ahead of anyone else.”

The availability of expanded formats and a far wider range of data have ignited residents, businesses, community activists, bloggers and media to transform the data into valuable resources for others.

3. **Cite the best verifiable evidence of the most significant achievements of the program or initiative.** (maximum 250 words)

In her spare time, a talented resident provides daily updates about her neighborhood on www.Jdland.com using data feeds provided by DC’s Office of the Chief Technology Officer. In Brazil and London, her website is regarded as an emerging form of journalism because such depth of information is not seen in traditional media. As a result, jdland.com won a Knight-Batten Citizen Media Award in September 2008.

A DC neighborhood advisory commissioner incorporated data and Yahoo Pipes to create six mashups for his constituents. Impressed by DC data, the Yahoo Pipes beta team used it to demonstrate how to create a pipe. A national site, crimereports.com, uses data feeds for mashups that segment crimes.

David Stephenson, a Web 2.0 guru, described the nation’s capital as “this country’s hands-down leaders on use of data feeds and data visualization.” To date, officials from Pittsburg, PA and Arlington, VA have indicated plans to replicate DC’s model. As a result of this recognition, OCTO has honored requests for best practice insight to the United Nations Foundation, National Wildlife Federation, Annie E. Casey Foundation, the World Bank, the Food and Drug Administration and others interested in offering their own data feeds.

“DC government also benefits,” as explained by a Washington Post reporter. “A lot of times we can answer our own questions and realize that something is or is not worthy of a story….Having datasets available for download rather than requiring the much more laborious Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) process also saves the government a lot of time.” Since the District deployed data feeds, the total number of FOIA requests decreased to 8,280 in FY2007 from 15,527 in FY2006.