City and County of Durham

How does the Open Data initiative in the city and county of Durham allow them to better inform the population via one common portal?

Located in central North Carolina (U.S.A.), Durham County is one of the fastest growing regions in the U.S. The area is home to the world-famous Research Triangle Park, international research and development centers, and world-class universities.

In early 2013, the city and the county of Durham decided to come together to pursue an ambitious Open Data initiative. *"Our community's entrepreneurial energy and creativity gives us an advantage to innovate new ways of doing business by making information readily accessible,"* said Durham City Manager Thomas J. Bonfield.

A challenge in and of itself, the partnership between both city and county governments also represented an extraordinary opportunity to bring together resources and ideas. With transparency as a major goal of the project, both entities had to find the right medium to make it easy for citizens to gain access to government data, while encouraging residents, entrepreneurs and government employees to utilize this abundance of public data for civic innovation.

The OpenDataSoft Solution

Designed by OpenDataSoft, the Durham Open Data portal (opendurham.nc.gov) was launched publicly in June 2015. It covers a broad spectrum of data related to a variety of topics and functions ranging from education to transport, police and justice information. The platform notably features:

- A data catalog for quick or thorough search for inquisitive users.
- Dashboards to enable an easy display of government information to empower citizens.
- APIs to allow developpers to connect data to applications.

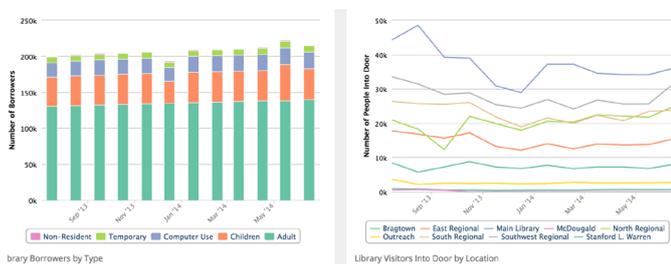### Ease of Use, Security and Storytelling

- **Easy as pie:** ease of use was at the top of Durham's list in the process of selecting the right platform. Built to be user-friendly, the OpenDataSoft solution allows anyone - with or without programming knowledge - to upload datasets and create pages, tabs or dashboards in the blink of an eye.

- **Security at the forefront:** the platform keeps public information separate from confidential and private data. Because it is also designed to help Durham drive internal operations, the platform had to include these security criteria at the very heart of its system.

- **Data storytelling:** as the platform automatically generates visualizations such as tables, graphs and maps, it gives Durham's team the ability to develop ready-to-use dashboards to make the data tell insightful stories.

Making Complex Information Digestible Through Dashboards

The Durham Open Data platform provides users with several dashboards designed to connect topic-related datasets together. This enables users to build meaningful visualizations, and sheds light on important correlations. Restaurant inspections, traffic and crashes, crimes and larcenies, library use statistics: the dashboards are very powerful tools for telling stories with data and making complex information comprehensible by anyone. User experience is enhanced with more information to access in fewer clicks.

"We can make 95% of what our citizens are really looking for available through the dashboards." Greg Marrow, CIO of Durham County Government.

"Our work with OpenDataSoft ensures that citizens will get an easy-to-view dashboard and a simple process to combine and sort through relevant datasets," Greg Marrow said. *"This will prevent users from being overwhelmed by the amount of public data and miss meaningful information."*

The library use dashboard can help draw parallels between types of borrowers, number of visitors by location, library programs and other relevant information related to book collections.

This heatmap displays the geographical density of restaurant inspections and can be explored via a dashboard that also offers visualizations of inspection results and food safety violations.

✅ Benefits for Durham

A More Simple and Transparent Government

In the past, a lot of the data made available by both the city and the county of Durham could only be read through Excel spreadsheets or PDFs. Now, whether exploring education or health-related datasets via their Open Data platform, users won't have to spend hours searching through files to understand what is going on in Durham.

Information in One Place

The Open Data initiative helped consolidate information into one place. Data are no longer scattered around different parts of the web, and residents of Durham can now browse through a well-structured multitude of data. They won't even have to ask the city or the county for this or that kind of information anymore.

"Our combined Open Data portal delivers one place for city and county government-related data. We are now taking steps to work with internal and external communities to optimize the portal to have the right datasets and deliver the highest quality user experiences." Les Hamashima, Assistant Director of Durham County's Information Services and Technology Department.

Are you ready to launch your Open Data project
to build the city of tomorrow?

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