



For immediate release

March 1, 2016

Contact: Jessica Yabsley at Jessica.yabsley@datacoalition.org or 202-415-4025

Press Release

Open Data will Transform California's Government and Society

California Data Demo Day brings together legislators, agency officials, and advocates to make the case for open data

Sacramento, CA -- Over 100 attendees participated in the [Data Coalition](#)'s second annual [California Data Demo Day](#) in Sacramento. Hosted by [Socrata](#), with additional sponsorship from the [Department of Better Technology](#), the event spotlighted the state's step-by-step progress in adopting consistent data standards to make its data searchable and publishing it for all to scrutinize and use.

But the discussion also illuminated challenges that are impeding the benefits of open data - public accountability, analytics-driven management, and automated compliance reporting - from being realized.

Representatives of Treasurer John Chiang, Attorney General Kamala Harris, and the Fair Political Practices Commission, joined by state legislative counsel Diane Boyer-Vine, introduced their offices' groundbreaking open data projects. Chiang's [DebtWatch](#) portal publishes municipalities' debt filings as open data; Harris' [OpenJustice](#) aggregates law enforcement information from state, county, and municipal sources; the FPPC is exploring ways to standardize and publish financial and

contribution disclosures; and the legislature has adopted an XML open data format to automatically track the lineage and impact of amendments, bills, and existing law.

Assemblymembers Ling Ling Chang (D-Los Angeles) and Brian Maienschein (R-SD) praised open data projects. “By releasing this data, the government is able to tap into the ingenuity of its citizens,” who can use open data sets to build useful apps and platforms. “Open data is a relatively new concept and one that is critically important to increasing transparency and making operations more effective and accountable to the public,” said Assemblymember Brian Maienschein. Maienschein’s Assembly Bill 169, which passed last year, set requirements for California local governments’ open data publication.

California’s legislative information, in particular, exemplifies the benefits of open data. Legislative Counsel Diane Boyer-Vine explained that the state’s XML data model for bills and amendments allows legislators and staffers to automatically view the impact of a proposed bill on existing law, even if the bill has been amended multiple times.

But panelists noted that the state has embraced few sweeping open data transformations. Unlike other states, for example, California does not publish detailed, checkbook-level spending information as open data. Assemblymember Chang said she would like to “see complete transparency with the budget ... I feel like [the state] government is so opaque ... [We must dig through] so many layers of complication to get the right information ... Just to be able to search through the budget would be great.” Jan Ross, deputy treasurer for technology and innovation, explained that the state’s spending information is separately managed by multiple agencies, including the Department of Finance, Department of General Services, comptroller’s office, and treasurer’s office.

Hurdles facing open data transformations include the availability of funding, privacy and reidentification concerns, cultural barriers, and the need to “show the quality of the data without manipulating it ... [agencies must answer the question] is this raw data or curated data,” said Ross.

Participants also noted that the state has no comprehensive plan for open data. Without clear expectations on which domains of the state’s and municipalities’ information will be standardized and published, and on what time frame, the technology industry cannot plan investments, said Sloane DellOrto of Digital Deployment, Inc. Assemblymember Chang encouraged the industry to “come educate us on all the issues ... It’s important to engage legislators early.”

“California’s government needs to agree on big plans, then go after them incrementally,” said Coalition executive director Hudson Hollister. “The Data Coalition is excited to work with leaders like Assemblymembers Maienschein and Chang on the broad open data mandates to set expectations, then encourage agencies to move toward them with small wins.”

Attendees represented many California executive branch agencies, including the Department of Justice, State Treasurer's office, Department of Education, and California State Controller. Corporate participants included host sponsor [Socrata](#), refreshment sponsor the [Department of Better Technology](#), [Esri](#), [Information Builders](#), [Open Gov](#), [Tableau](#), [Workiva](#), and [Xcential](#).

About the Data Coalition

The Data Coalition advocates on behalf of the private sector and the public interest for the publication of government information as standardized, open data. Open data enhances accountability, improves government management, reduces compliance costs, and stimulates innovation. Representing a cross-section of the technology industry, the Coalition’s membership includes market leaders such as Workiva, RR Donnelley, Booz Allen Hamilton, and CGI Federal and growing start-ups such as idaciti and CBeyondData. For more information, visit datacoalition.org.

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