Creating Community Trust Through Data

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Introduction

Nationwide, trust is the link connecting agencies and the public. But today, many state and local agencies are discovering they need more information about the communities they serve. Agencies cannot help what they cannot understand, and this lack of context means government employees cannot aid their constituents effectively. Even worse, the less agencies know about the people they are assisting, the less understood these people feel. Over time, mistrust grows between both sides.

Thankfully, data can prevent this erosion of faith. Using data, agencies can see constituents clearly and make the best possible products and services for their needs. For the public, data can increase the accountability and transparency they have from their governments. No matter the level of agency, the result is a win for everyone involved.

Even better, cloud computing can reveal powerful insights about agencies' data. Using the cloud, agencies can establish data platforms that store information from disparate sources in one place. Gradually, these platforms help agencies gain more visibility into the public.

During GovLoop's recent virtual event, "The Power of Data Collaboration for State and Local Governments," government and industry experts shared best practices for analyzing and handling data. The event was sponsored by Snowflake, a cloud-based data cloud provider.

Read more to hear how some of your peers have tapped into their data to improve the relationships between their workforces and communities.

Experts

Josh Martin, Chief Data Officer, Indiana Management Performance Hub (MPH)

John Corellus, Deputy State Chief Information Officer and Chief Data Officer, North Carolina

Emily Yates, Smart City Director, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

**Kathryn Darnall Helms**, Chief Data Officer, Oregon

Nicholas Speece, Chief Federal Technologist, Snowflake

Ted Girard, Vice President, Public Sector, Snowflake

▶ **Watch the recorded session:** *"The Power of Data Collaboration for State & Local Governments"*

# Audience Snapshot: How Do You Feel About Your Data?

During GovLoop's virtual event, we surveyed our audience about data and how it's used at their agencies. Here's what we heard:

How well do you understand your agency's data?

- 3.8% Very well
- 15.4% I can't access my agency's data
- 15.4% Not well at all
- 65.4% Moderately well
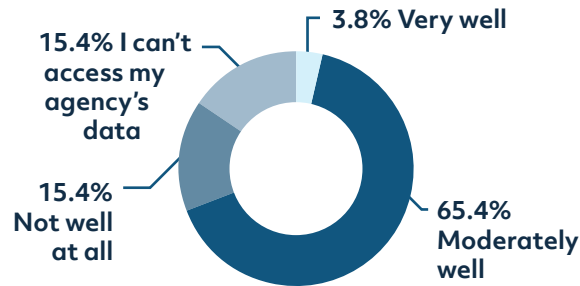
Before you can begin using data effectively, you must understand what you have and what it means. To understand data literacy – or the ability to read, work with, analyze and communicate with data – we asked attendees how well they understand the data their agencies have.

How easily can your agency share its data internally and externally?

- 5.6% Very easily
- 16.7% I can't share my agency's data
- 16.7% Not easily
- 61.1% Somewhat easily
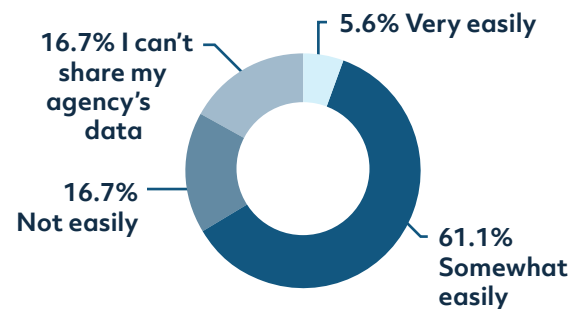
When we asked how easily people could share their agency's data internally and externally, we heard similar sentiments.

"The challenge is where do you start?" Josh Martin, Chief Data Officer (CDO), Indiana Management Performance Hub, said. "There's so much [data], in so many places, and you really have to start thinking through … where is it coming from, how is it being collected, who is the originating source, what is the flow along the way? So, there's just a whole lot of things to just figure out [and] figure out in a hurry."

Does your agency have the information it needs to serve citizens effectively?

- 15.4% I have no idea
- 53.8% Yes
- 30.8% Partially
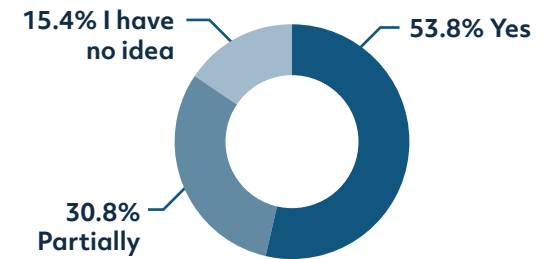
The good news is that 54% of respondents said their agency has the information it needs to serve citizens effectively. Next, the issue is ensuring the data can be effectively shared and analyzed for insights. What's clear from our survey is that data literacy is key. If employees don't know what information is available, they can't access it or share it.

Martin's team, meanwhile, benefited from having a cloud environment that enabled it to collaborate on its data with various stakeholders. "That was really a game-changer for us," he said.

Try this: *What's one practical step your agency can take today to make employees more aware of what data they can access, where to access it and how to access it? Think about the nature of their work and what could be most beneficial.*

Case Studies About Building Trust Through Data-Sharing

Issues such as COVID-19, economic recovery and rising homicide rates are rarely contained within one team – or one data source. To tackle pressing issues, state and local agencies are improving their processes of collaborating and sharing data to drive solutions. Here are some examples.

Indiana Builds Data Pipelines, Filling 90% of Vaccination Vacancies in One Area

Communication on vaccination takes more than the right words – it takes the right data.

When Indiana's public health department approached the Management Performance Hub (MPH), an analytics agency, for help with vaccination outreach, MPH already had a data tool it could use.

MPH was created at the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic for a different purpose: to help researchers assess the coronavirus's prevalence. It needed a random population sampling to accurately study the infection rate, which MPH put together through gathering data from various sources, said Joshua Martin, Indiana's CDO.

This data pipeline came into use months later to communicate with specific age groups and, eventually, the public, about vaccine appointments.

The iterated pipeline became particularly valuable for reaching one area, where only 10% of vaccine appointments were filled.

» That meant 90% of appointments were open, but residents were not signing up for them.

Using the same data tool, MPH and the public health department then pushed notices to people in targeted ZIP codes.

» **The result:** Within an hour, the 90% vacancy became zero.

## Oregon Closes Data Gaps to Help Oregonians Recover From COVID-19

Oregon is only two years into its enterprise data journey, but it is emphasizing constituents as a critical component from the start.

"It's not only a matter of what kind of analytic tools can we deploy, or which questions are we asking, which are all important, but really partnering with communities and community-based organizations to make sure our constituents' voices are heard when it comes to leveraging data," said Kathryn Darnall Helms, the state's Chief Data Officer.

Helms said the goal is to leverage data as a strategic asset to "support all Oregonians."

Take financial recovery, for example. Consumer spending bounce-back is an important piece to COVID-19 recovery. But when it comes to conducting spending analyses, people who use cash are left out of the data.

To understand COVID-19's impact on residents who are less visible, Oregon is crafting a gap analysis and identifying qualitative data, such as interviews and oral histories, to achieve a whole picture.
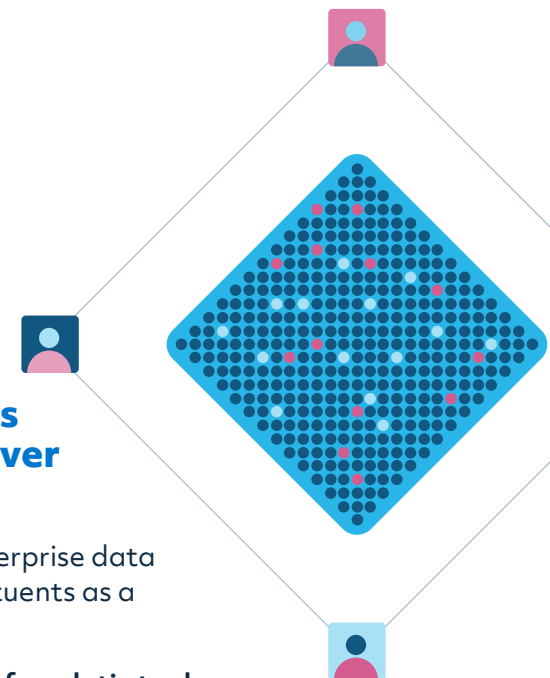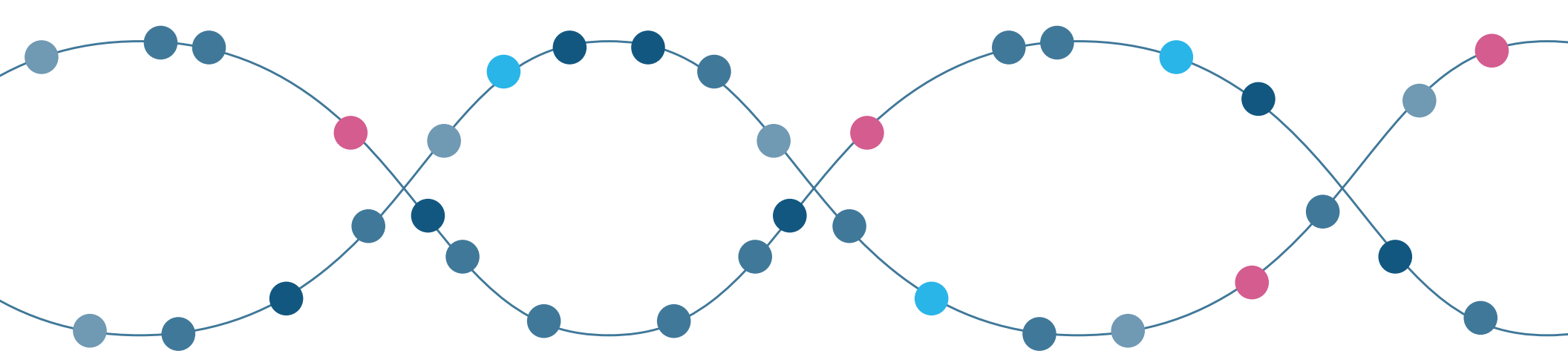
North Carolina Runs a Health Information Exchange for 13 Million Patients

North Carolina's Government Data Analytics Center (GDAC) is overseeing a health information exchange program that serves millions of people outside of the state.

The health information exchange improves care quality by allowing clinical data to be shared with authorized health care providers across a secure network.

» GDAC has partnerships with the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) and other states, serving 13 million patients in total.

The expansive data exchange alone is a feat to celebrate, but it isn't the only one, said John Correllus, North Carolina's Deputy Chief Information Officer (CIO) and Chief Data Officer.

» Improved collaboration between agencies with GDAC's help is just as commendable.

"One of the other successes is actually not us necessarily doing the data in analytic form but facilitating the conversation with other agencies so they're sharing more effectively, whether that's providing an instrument or being able to have them talk the same language, so data-sharing can happen," Correllus said.

Philadelphia Shares Smart City Data to Reduce Violence

Unexpected partners can arise with data education.

One of the main functions of Philadelphia's smart city program – SmartCityPHL – is not only collecting data but educating stakeholders on the value of it.

For example, the agency collects microscale urban data, information collected from the built environment through artificial intelligence (AI) and machine learning, to help the city better understand the quality of public spaces.

Smart City Director Emily Yates expected the Streets Department or Parks & Recreation to primarily find this data helpful. But instead, the Office of Violence Prevention approached her team with interest in learning more.

» **Rising homicide rates** and the correlation between quality of the built environment and reduction of violence made microscale urban data a valuable tool for the office. With it, the agency could co-create interventions to lower homicide rates in the context of movements to defund the police.

"**The hope is that we can reframe the conversation** that has some … tensions between the community and police, utilizing this data that isn't typically brought into these conversations," Yates said.

Enhancing People, Policies and Pipes to Share Data

Believe it or not, data is not enough to bring agencies and the public closer together. Both groups need one source of truth about this information to be on the same page. Picture a digital platform containing data that everyone agrees is accurate, reliable and informative.

Getting data platforms, however, requires agencies to build a foundation for supporting them. Subsequently, gathering all their data into such repositories requires three things from agencies.

» First, agencies must cultivate workforces that realize data's importance and collaborate on and share this information.

» Second, agencies benefit from policies that make examining, governing and partnering with other organizations on their data easier.

» Third, agencies need to utilize technology that provides citizens with accessible and useful data to provide a pleasing customer experience (CX).

"Data itself is a raw resource," said Nicholas Speece, Chief Federal Technologist at Snowflake. "It is useless on its own. We have to make it into insights."

Speece shared three tips for establishing cloud-based data platforms that serve as a single source of truth for agencies and citizens.

Eliminate Data Silos

Sometimes the biggest barrier between two parties touching government data is the people involved. Internally, many agencies have teams that are reluctant to disseminate their data to others. Externally, these agencies are often hesitant to share their information with the outside world.

Fortunately, data literacy can tear down any information silos agencies have. Data literacy is the ability to create, read, understand and communicate information from data. For example, cybersecurity personnel must explain risk data properly or vulnerabilities may not get fixed.

"We work the way our data is arranged," Speece said. "When our data is arranged in silos, we work in those silos."

Perfect Data Policies

For too long, agencies have created rules that prevent them from effortlessly trading data with potential partners. Take state governments. In the past, some states have restricted how much information their employees can share with other states.

To get the optimal results from their data, agencies need to eliminate policies like these. Initially, agencies should draft guidelines for swapping information more smoothly with their global, federal, state and local peers. Next, agencies should empower their employees to cooperate more with academia, citizens and the private sector on everyone's data.

"When I show you the data behind my decisions, you can understand them," Speece said. "Trust is built from transparency. If you build trust, you get people."

Make Cloud Count

The cloud makes computer system resources such as data storage available on-demand while decentralizing IT infrastructure. Because of this, cloud's many capabilities can overwhelm agencies new to using it. Consequently, properly adopting cloud pushes agencies to embrace the model that best fits their needs.

Consider software-as-a-service (SaaS), which licenses and delivers software on a subscription basis from the cloud. Using this format, agencies can rapidly launch, scale and use applications for their data, such as solutions fortifying that information's security.

Even better, SaaS clouds can make equipping agencies with emerging technology such as artificial intelligence (AI) a breeze. AI imitates human cognitive abilities like reasoning, enabling agencies to detect and profit from data patterns faster.

"If you're able to go into the cloud, you have a much longer runway to start breaking down these silos," Speece said.

Verbatims

Data testimonials about the purpose, potential and priorities of data

In Philadelphia …

"We feel very passionately about collecting data and making sure that we use it to be effective in the way we deliver our services, as well as how we engage with the community.

And the foundation of that is that all data that we collect, that does not carry [personally identifiable information (PII)], we make available to the public through our open data portal. We have a chief data officer, we have an open data team because we feel so strongly about that. And I think it's important that as a city we do this because it helps with accountability, it helps with public involvement, allows for data-driven decisions to be made — especially right now where at least the feeling is that there's a challenge of trust between government and citizens. We saw it with Black Lives Matter uprisings around the data, that we are collecting as a city, and how that was being used."

– Emily Yates, Smart City Director, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

Oregon …

"Is relatively new, I would say, in our enterprise data journey.

We've spent the past two years developing that enterprise data strategy, and it really is focused on leveraging data as a strategic asset to support all Oregonians. And it was really critical for us in thinking about our data strategy and how we've been using data – that representation and visibility for our communities is critical when it comes to how we leverage data. So, it's not only a matter of what kind of analytic tools can we deploy, or which questions are we asking, which are all important, but really partnering with communities and community-based organizations to make sure that our constituents' voices are heard when it comes to leveraging data. Our data strategy has a very strong focus as well in the area of data justice; so, making sure that we're utilizing technology and data to support racial justice, and to support equity, and to support equitable outcomes."

– Kathryn Darnall Helms, Chief Data Officer, Oregon

In North Carolina …

"Really, data is a strategy.

My organization's success is not when we work with one agency, just working on their data. Our organizational success really comes from solving enterprise problems. And so that really is, not working with one agency's dataset, but working with multiple agencies' datasets to solve problems. I call it, 'the value and the insights are in between the agencies.'"

– John Corellus, Deputy Chief Information Officer and Chief Data Officer, North Carolina

How Snowflake Can Help

Many of today's problems are essentially data problems. Snowflake shatters barriers that prevent organizations from unleashing the true value from their data. Thousands of customers around the world mobilize their data in ways previously unimaginable with Snowflake's Data Cloud and platform – a solution for data warehousing, exchange, application development and more.

"One of the biggest moves we've made at Snowflake is our move to the data cloud, where we enable organizations to bring in external datasets from our marketplace and combine it with their own data in real time," said Snowflake's Speece.

"It's really a culture thing. And we're seeing great work being done across the board. The fact that the government is establishing CDOs, the CDOs have their own State CDO Network, they're meeting together, they're collaborating … **We're no longer just talking about solving this problem. We're actually doing it."**
– *Ted Girard, Vice President, Public Sector, Snowflake*

5 Steps Toward Data Maturity

Throughout the virtual event, our experts continually emphasized the importance of thinking in terms of achieving data maturity, or putting in place policies, processes and practices that lead to repeatable success with data initiatives. Here are five of the key elements they discussed:

1 Cultivate data literacy. In most organizations, people tend to see data as the responsibility of data scientists. But data is too important to be left to those professionals alone. To make data-driven decision-making a reality, agencies need to train a wide range of employees in how to work with data.

2 Get buy-in by showing outcomes. Employees are not likely to make the effort to become data literate if they do not see the value in doing so. Use every opportunity you get to showcase examples of how data has played a pivotal role in solving a problem or shaping a program.

3 Cultivate collaboration. Agencies often complain that data is managed in different silos across their organizations. But the real problem is when people get stuck in silos as well. The key is to encourage cross-team collaboration on data initiatives. When people see the value of that, those data silos will fall.

4 Establish a baseline for data governance. Individual teams or offices in an agency can get stymied thinking about everything that goes into a data initiative – not just finding the right tools but creating the necessary policies and processes. By providing a central data governance strategy, an agency can remove that hurdle and let people focus on solving mission-oriented problems.

5 Understand the gaps in your data. Agencies can use data to assess whether their policies and programs are having an equitable impact on different populations – but only if agencies have been collecting the necessary demographics. When launching an equity initiative, conduct a gap analysis to determine what data might be missing and to identify alternative sources.

About Snowflake

Leverage the Snowflake Data Cloud and platform to power IT modernization, improve citizen services, and drive innovation and efficiency. Snowflake delivers a FedRAMP-authorized, single, seamless experience across multiple public clouds.

Learn more at Snowflake.com/public-sector.

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 300,000 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.

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