

Data Reliability: The City provides data through its Open Data Portal, but lacks strategy and oversight

City of Austin's Open Data Portal

Austin Open Data portal is a public data-sharing site for residents, community members and anyone interested in accessing and using the City's data.



Objective

The objectives of this audit were:

1. Have data reliability issues encountered in previous audits been addressed?
2. Is the information shared by the City on the Open Data Portal reliable, accessible, and useful?

Austin follows some of the best practices for open data.

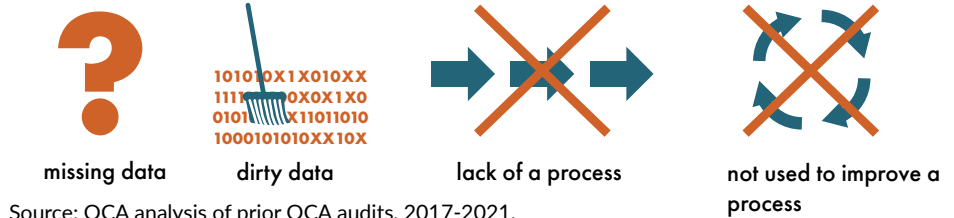
- Open data policy
- Public portal
- User-friendly process for sharing data internally & externally
- User guidance
- Data strategy & governance
- Data inventory
- Track insights about users

Source: OCA analysis of open data best practices.

Background

Over half of our office's audits from 2017-2021 identified data reliability issues. These audits covered 20 departments and various citywide issues. We looked at seven high risk audits to determine if the issues had been addressed. Departments made progress with their data issues in five instances, but only three were fully implemented. About half of the data reliability recommendations we sampled were behind schedule.

The most common data reliability issues.



As a result of the data reliability issues in previous audits, we decided to look at the City's data reliability more broadly. We focused this audit on the City's Open Data Portal. The portal is a public data sharing website that provides community members access to a wide range of the City's data.

What We Found

Finding 1: The City lacks a strategy for providing data. Individual departments make data publicly available through the Open Data Portal, but often without a clear purpose or audience for the data. Data is often not presented in a way to make it accessible to a wide audience.

The City follows some of the best practices for open data and is in the process of improving on others. However, we found:

- The City does not have a clearly identified audience for its data and does not have an overall strategy for what data departments should share.
- The City does not have an inventory of assets.
- Many assets on the Open Data Portal are not frequently accessed.
- Datasets are not consistently formatted or easy to interpret.
- The City does not know who is accessing data or how they use the data.

Data Reliability

What We Found, Continued

Finding 2: Data in sampled assets on the Open Data Portal do not consistently match departments' data. Departments are responsible for the accuracy, timeliness, and usefulness of content, but managing open data is not a primary function of departments.

Specifically, we found:

- Six of eleven assets we sampled from the Open Data Portal did not match the departments' source data.
- The discrepancies between data on the public portal and in the departments' source data affected as few as two records to hundreds of thousands of records.
- Both manually and automatically updated assets had missing or incorrect data.
- Manual updates were subject to typos or other entry errors and may not be updated regularly.
- Automatic updates were not always checked for accuracy and completeness.

As a result of these issues, community members and City decision makers who use data from the Open Data Portal are getting information that may be incomplete, inaccurate, or otherwise different from the data departments use when making decisions.

Six out of eleven assets' data do not match the departments' data.

Asset	Do the data match?	Types of differences
Crime Reports (<i>sample</i>)	Yes	None
Mixed Beverage Gross Receipts (<i>external</i>)	Same system	None
Top-10-Searches-Chart	Yes	None
Unclaimed Property	Yes	None
AFO eCheckbook (<i>2020-2021 only</i>)	Yes	None
Austin 311 Public Data	No	Missing service requests
Austin Animal Center Outcomes	No	Missing two animals
Issued Construction Permits (<i>sample</i>)	No	Different permit dates
Food Establishment Inspection Scores (<i>sample</i>)	No	Scores did not match
Pool Map	No	Pool statuses and hours were outdated
Real-Time Traffic Incident Reports	No	Missing incidents

Source: OCA analysis of Open Data Portal assets.

What We Recommend

Recommendation 1

The City should articulate a clear goal for Open Data and data practices more generally. The City should create a Citywide strategy for collecting and sharing data. While the motivation for the ODP was to make data directly available to the public, a Citywide strategy should:

- use the performance indicator for how often assets are accessed to determine which assets are higher interest,
- interpret the most desired data with visualizations and/or data stories, in addition to providing the raw data, and
- remove outdated assets from the Open Data Portal.

Recommendation 2

The City Manager should establish centralized oversight over open data, with:

- an inventory of all assets on the Open Data Portal, and
- processes in place to ensure data is correct and timely.