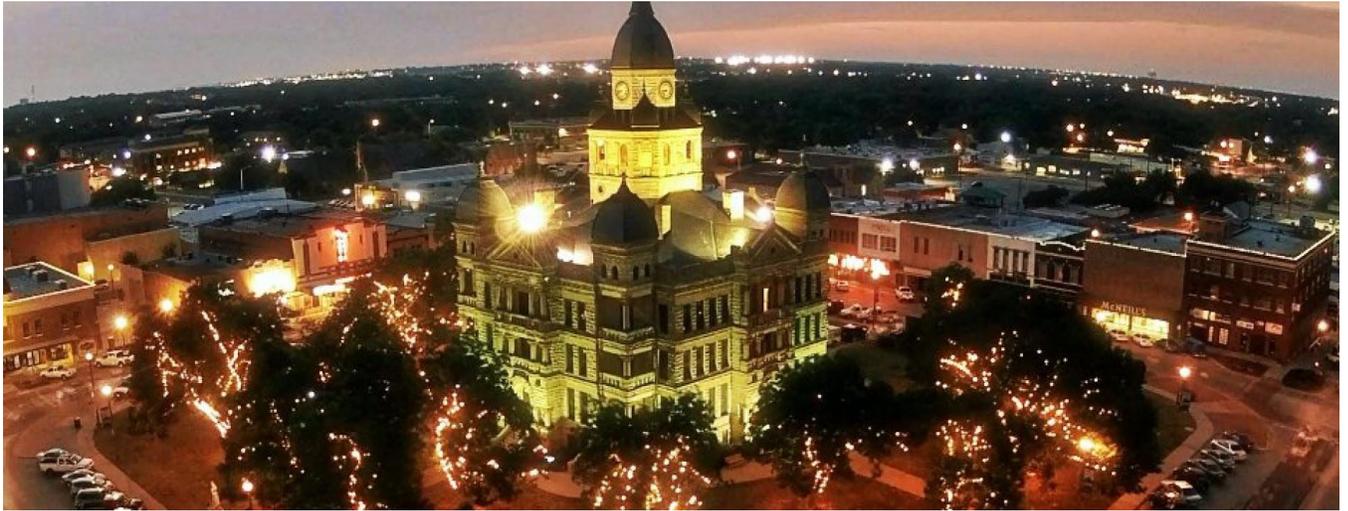


City Feature: Denton, TX

Using data and evidence for smarter decision-making

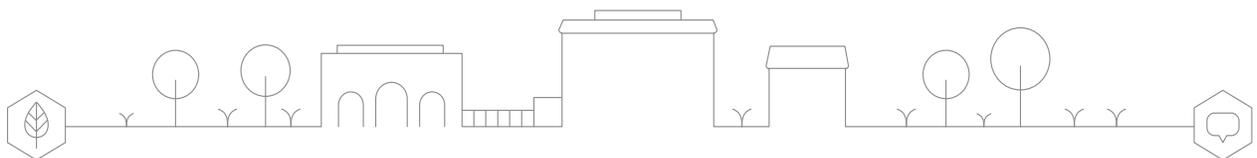


Setting the Stage

With a rapidly growing population, Denton is home to a vibrant technology and start-up community. Understanding the vital role that city government plays in shaping a great community, Mayor Chris Watts and City Manager George Campbell have led with a clear mandate to leverage data and evidence to increase government efficiency and cost-effectiveness, and spur local innovation. The City launched its open data initiative in February, 2016 with an Open Data administrative policy and an open data portal hosting 99 datasets pertaining to key city functions including infrastructure, land use, parks, and gas wells. As part of its newly public and codified commitment to transparency and open government, Denton prioritized an active engagement with residents and the local academic community. Through its citizen survey and city council strategic planning and budget process, Denton balanced key issues such as infrastructure repairs, economic development, and further routinizing citywide performance measurement. City Council and staff worked to fold these efforts into the development of the annual strategic plan as part of its planning and budgeting process.

Beyond the citizen survey, the City considered additional avenues for stakeholder participation. The City hosted a “pitch day” where residents suggested ideas for utilizing the City’s open data, such as developing an open data map for upcoming development and city projects, an application to identify open parking spots in the downtown, and a website designed to encourage voter turnout. Mayor Watts, City Manager Campbell, city staff, and residents continue to build upon this momentum to grow Denton as a bastion for innovative and smart decision-making.

The Prospect to Advance Change



Serving as the city's foundational strategy document, Denton maintains an annual citywide strategic plan that identifies well defined Key Focus Areas (KFAs), goals, and objectives for the upcoming year. The plan also includes key action steps and performance measures for each focus area. However, senior staff quickly realized the great potential for aligning department management metrics and the citywide strategy document. This alignment was extended to the City's open data initiative where Denton's senior staff considered how to best strategically release datasets most relevant to the KFAs.

The Opportunity

With commitment from the Mayor, City Manager, and the executive team, What Works Cities (WWC) identified two ways for Denton to partner with the experts at the Center for Government Excellence at Johns Hopkins University (GovEx) and Results for America through a performance management program and open data.

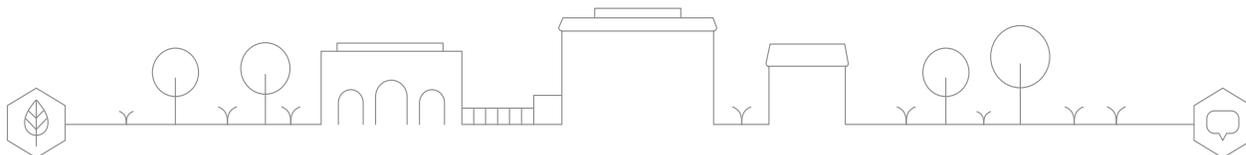
Denton and the WWC team worked together to build out a performance management program that would help the city use data more effectively to drive decision-making and track progress towards citywide goals. Assistant City Manager Bryan Langley and his team highlighted an opportunity to clarify how departments contribute to the city's priorities and to improve their ability to use data and evidence to eliminate barriers to progress. To address this challenge, Denton concentrated on the goal of a "Safe, livable and family-friendly community." The City leveraged its assets including the leadership of its city manager and assistant city managers who encourage the use of data to drive decision-making; a strategic plan that captures the priorities of city council; the timing of its budget process; and the willingness of departments to share data and solve problems. The new performance framework was designed to bolster a culture of collaboration and problem solving, and lend itself as a citywide, data-driven governance tool.

The City also focused on strategically aligning its open data work around the KFAs, operating in concert with the performance management program, where the City again began with the KFA of "safe, livable and family-friendly community." To address the need for city leaders to better communicate openly with residents and City Councilmembers about their decision-making process and recent successes, Denton worked to streamline data governance roles and responsibilities under the Director of Technology Services, who leads a weekly meeting with the internal IT team. This group began documenting data sources and systems, the basis of an open data inventory. The City also worked to further engage the academic and resident community through local civic hacking events in which they invited residents and the local university to write applications, liberate data, create visualizations, and publish analyses using Denton's open data.

Underlying both the performance management and open data work was an opportunity to begin dismantling departmental silos, reorient how the city was using data to make decisions, and better communicate its goals to residents.

Key Accomplishments

- The City will hold a Stat meeting for each key performance area, in which each department will be invited to answer questions about trends in their data, and outline how they will make progress toward these goals;
- Defined who will prepare for and lead performance management meetings;
- Prioritized the Key Focus Area of Safe, Livable, & Family-Friendly Community, for the city's initial performance management meeting, and aligned the open data work with these priorities;
- Identified key departments responsible for the focus area of Safe, Livable, & Family-Friendly Community and is developing strategic outcomes, goals, KPIs and action steps for other Key Focus Areas
- Denton stated its internal commitment to data and evidence during presentations to its Leadership Team, and City Council, as well as in framing and goal-setting sessions with departments;
- Denton partnered with the University of North Texas (UNT) on an Open Data Day project, in which residents were invited to write applications, liberate data, create visualizations, and publish analyses using Denton data, to identify solutions related to homelessness, blight, crime, code enforcement, and other priorities.
- Denton added a survey to the city's open data portal asking users to indicate their purpose for using the website, the



features that they find useful, and additional data they would like to see related to the city's strategic priorities.

- Denton streamlined its data governance activities under the Data Coordinator position; and is pursuing opportunities to automate the publication of data on its open data portal.

