Baltimore

Working closely with City Data Alliance coaches, Baltimore continued to be a national leader in data integration, launching the Baltimore Data Academy, expanding its open-data portal, and identifying data-driven solutions to a wide range of challenges, including restarting recycling collection.

Highlights

Launched the Baltimore Data Academy, a first-of-its-kind data training program created to serve all Baltimore City employees.

Expanded Open Baltimore, the city's open data platform, and added an open-data dashboard for residents to track progress on updates and provide input.

Identified data-driven solutions to restart the city's recycling collection program, with progress monitored during regular CleanStat meetings.

Background

Baltimore City entered the CDA program with a strong Mayoral vision connected to the Mayor's Action Plan, specifically pillar 5, "Responsible Stewardship of City Resources." This pillar included data-specific goals and sub-goals, which the Scott Administration set out to tackle with the support of the City Data Alliance. These goals included instituting a modern, centralized data system to improve operational efficiency, data quality, and public transparency, implementing systems to strengthen the city's cybersecurity infrastructure, ensuring resident data privacy, and mitigating the impact of future cyberattacks.

Mayor Scott also promised to deliver quality, efficient customer service to all residents through a lens of equity, accessibility, and accountability and to recruit, retain, and develop a diverse and high-achieving workforce, in part by developing a citywide data training program, and improving government performance, accountability, and cross-agency collaboration by developing and managing a new performance management system for city government. The mayor also promised to increase transparency and meaningful resident participation in government, in part by expanding Open Baltimore and making it more user friendly, with community-developed data tools, maps, and other reports to enhance city data transparency.

During its participation in CDA, the city made progress across all of these goals, successfully completing several, and moving others forward in ways that saw significant impact for residents.

Impact

Chief Data Officer, Justin Elszasz, drafted a comprehensive citywide data strategy, which has gained traction with the City Administrator's Office, and which, in connection with mayoral priorities and goals articulated above, has guided impactful project work.

City Administrator Faith Leach identified a need to address the city's projected return to weekly recycling collection. In keeping with CDA learnings and a data-driven approach to problem solving, Leach and representatives across at least half a dozen city agencies came together to review data on the current status, and to co-design innovative solutions. Working groups collaborated with the CDO's office to gather data to understand different aspects of this issue, including budget, maintenance, training, and hiring. Working groups presented solutions and developed a plan. Progress and metrics for success will be tracked during the City's regular CleanStat meetings. The progress earned significant media attention.

Following on the success of the data-driven approach to recycling, Leach brought her team together for three additional 90-day sprints aimed at cleaning and greening efforts across the city, which also earned media attention. Specifically, they prioritized graffiti removal, road resurfacing, and filling potholes. For each priority, they set data-informed goals and closely tracked progress, with efforts and targets continually adjusted as necessary.

Building a data-informed workforce formed the cornerstone of Baltimore's CDA work, with the launch of the Baltimore Data Academy, demonstrating an enormous commitment to data training and citywide accountability, understanding, and upskilling around data. At the start of the CDA program, the city identified internal, citywide training on data practices as its highest priority. This goal was part of the mayor's action plan, and, through a collaborative effort led by Elszasz in partnership with the Department of Human Resources, various agency heads, and the City Administrator, the city undertook an assessment of data capacity across all city agencies.

Based on results of this assessment, Elszasz worked together with agency heads to design a series of courses aimed at different personas of city staff, including Foundations of Data Literacy, Interpreting Data with Greater Accuracy and Insight, Leading with Data, Data Stewardship, and Measuring Government Performance.

Each course, developed with the Bloomberg Center for Government Excellence, consists of 3-5 self-guided modules, which can be completed asynchronously. Courses were opened to employees in January 2023, and to date over 550 city employees have enrolled, earning coverage in Cities Today, CBS News, the Baltimore Sun and Bloomberg Cities Network.

As noted above, the Mayor's Action Plan included plans to expand Open Baltimore, the city's open data platform and create "a modern, centralized data system to improve operational efficiency, data quality, and public transparency."

In addition to modernizing and improving Open Baltimore, CDO Elszasz created, as part of the 90-day sprints, an open-data dashboard that provides interactive space for residents to track progress on the sprints, and to provide their own input and feedback. The effort served as a key example of two-way data communication, and the expansion of data portals that can provide partnership with residents and create direct and meaningful impact.