

February 3, 2004

OPEN DATA CONSORTIUM Model Data Distribution Policy Entering its Second Phase

by

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Last year, the Open Data Consortium, a public-private partnership project funded by the USGS and private companies, developed an historic model data distribution policy for guiding local government dissemination of public-record geodata.

"The data distribution policy developed by the Open Data Consortium will enable local governments to move responsively in handling public requests for spatial data, and will reduce barriers to inter-agency data sharing, thereby advancing the NSDI vision for The National Map and a Geospatial One-Stop portal to map data," said Kathy Covert, Associate Strategist for the Federal Geographic Data Committee Secretariat.

The policy model was developed through a series of collaborative dialogues with stakeholders representing diverse interests from city and county governments, state and Federal agencies, as well as private sector data service providers, universities and professional associations. A wide variety of alternatives were analyzed and considered before arriving at the recommendations in the model policy.

The policy is intended to serve as a guideline for local governments that need to formulate a data distribution policy, or make their current policy more effective. University of Illinois Professor Zorica Nedovic-Budic characterized the model policy as "comprehensive and balanced." It is a plea for more openness, while dealing with the fact that many governmental data producers want to retain proprietary and financial control over their product (which is the public's data).

67 people worked together, through the Open Data Consortium project, over a six month period, contributing their ideas and opinions in 24 telephone conferences, to forge a consensus on the model policy. An additional 50 people were involved in reviewing and commenting on interim products and final document.

The model policy addresses the major legal and commercial issues concerning public data distribution, such as, **copyright, licensing, liability, security restrictions, privacy considerations, metadata maintenance, data recipients and distribution methods**, as well as the controversial issue of **data sales**. Developing it has been a consensus-building success sustained by dedicated participants actively listening to each other.

The model policy is available at the ODC website, www.OpenDataConsortium.org, along with additional data studies, data policy documents used by other agencies, and links to useful geodata information.

The key to resolving the long-standing controversy of data sales by local government was our discovery of many superior ways to support GIS operations. These methods came from the ODC participants' own experience and are presented in a report entitled, "10 Ways to Support GIS Without Selling Data," also available on the ODC website. While the model policy acknowledges that selling data is counter-productive to public agency interests in distributing their geographic data, it does not prohibit such sales. Instead, it offers a method for selling data, to those agencies that still believe they need to sell their geodata, that is less of an impediment to public access than many current policies.

Among the ten ways of supporting GIS, the project discovered such revenue-enhancing techniques as analyzing address locations with GIS to more accurately identify sources of existing tax revenue (a process called "geo-auditing"). Geodata has also been used to cut costs through geo-analysis of reimbursable route transit, through better placement of fire station facilities, and through more efficient management of multiple infrastructure maintenance budgets. These are real revenues and savings garnered through the use of geodata, not simply the savings from more efficient mapping and maintenance of geodata.

Concluding the USGS contract with the GeoData Alliance (www.GeoAll.net) for the initial, policy-formulation phase, it has been a pleasure at working with, and learning from, the ODC participants. Through cooperative communication, we were able to learn not only how current data policies came into being, but what were the underlying reasons for their creation. As those root causes are addressed, there will be fewer impediments to accessing local geodata.

Phase II of the project will formulate recommendations for changing government accounting practices in order to identify the financial revenues and cost savings accrued from using geodata, with the intention of allocating some of those benefits back to the GIS operations departments. The project will also deeply engage in educating the wider GIS Community about the current findings and model policy recommendations, and will help individual local agencies adopt the model to their specific data distribution policy needs. Phase II will commence as soon as the ODC project receives adequate funding from grants, sponsorship, and contracts.

Local agencies that would like help adopting the model policy and data license to their particular situation should contact Bruce Joffe. We expect support from both government agencies and private companies because this is a win-win-win policy recommendation; it serves local government, private data service providers, and most importantly, the general public.

Offers for sponsorship support and helpful suggestions can be sent to GIS.Consultants@joffes.com or Bruce@OpenDataConsortium.org.

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