OFFICE OF THE INSPECTOR GENERAL

City of Chicago

REPORT OF THE INSPECTOR GENERAL'S OFFICE:

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DESCRIPTION OF THE OPEN CHICAGO INITIATIVE

MARCH 2011

Introduction

All levels of government have increasingly recognized that transparency fosters public trust and confidence by ensuring accountability and promoting collaboration between the government and its stakeholders.   Recent examples of efforts at increased transparency include President Obama's Open Government Directive to "establish a system of transparency, public participation, and collaboration,"[1] and amendments to the Illinois Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) which increased the power of residents to get information through requests to State government.[2]

The City's Transparency Efforts

Likewise, the City of Chicago has committed itself to transparency and taken some steps at opening up the workings of City government to the public. Some of the more important efforts include: (i) a Vendor, Contract and Payment Search website where interested users can view contracts, see how much is being paid to vendors, and view economic disclosure statements; (ii) public disclosure of budget documents with several levels of detail allowing users to obtain general or certain forms of specific information depending on their needs; and (iii) posting all FOIA requests on-line "in the interests of transparency and the free flow of information."[3]

Despite these important strides, gaps remain in the City's transparency efforts. Some examples are:

- Detailed information regarding expenditures for such things as tax-increment financing (TIF) districts and Capital and Grant Funds is limited and not holistic.[4]
- Many documents the City publishes on-line are non-searchable pdfs which impede independent analysis.
- Statistical performance measurement data is published only once per year and only at a summary level.[5] By contrast, many municipalities publish detailed statistical information on their operations as frequently as every month.[6]

These shortcomings render true accountability in City operations a work in progress.

IGO's Role

The IGO's statutory mandate to promote "economy, efficiency, effectiveness and integrity in the administration of the programs and operations of the city government,"[7] necessarily includes the promotion of transparency of City government. The IGO is uniquely positioned to enhance transparency of City government because it has the knowledge to provide the proper context for, and analysis of, City data as well as the technical capabilities of making that data accessible to the public.

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[1] http://www.whitehouse.gov/the_press_office/TransparencyandOpenGovernment/

[2] http://foia.ilattorneygeneral.net/

[3] http://mayor.cityofchicago.org/mayor/en/press_room/press_releases/2010/may_2010/0513_web_transparency.html

[4] http://progressillinois.com/2009/8/5/columns/tif-sunshine-review

[5] http://www.cityofchicago.org/content/dam/city/depts/obm/supp_info/2011_Program_and_Budget_Summary.pdf

[6] *See, e.g,* http://nyc.gov/html/ops/cpr/html/home/home.shtml

[7] City of Chicago. Municipal Code. 2-56-030 (c)

Beginning in the second quarter of 2011, the IGO will roll out an initiative, named Open Chicago, with the objective of enhancing transparency in City government. This initiative is designed to increase the understanding of City government for all stakeholders (city residents, the media, even members of the City Council), and to promote efficiency, effectiveness and integrity in the City's operations that can come only from accountability achieved through meaningful public scrutiny. Open Chicago will have three main components:

1. Increasing the transparency of the IGO's audits and program reviews
2. Publishing and linking to public, non-confidential City data and documents on the IGO's website
3. Identifying best practices in government transparency and accountability

1. Increasing the transparency of the IGO's audits and program reviews

IGO public reports are designed to better inform City stakeholders about the inner workings of City government, and the office will strive to make the analysis and the data that form the basis of these reports public. As much as possible, the office will "show its work" and try to communicate how it has conducted the analysis that underlies its reports. This will enhance interested parties' understanding of the office's analytical approach and allow them to conduct further research and check the office's findings.

Specifically, the office will:

Publish Underlying data
For policy and program reviews and audits, relevant source data and more complex calculations will be published in Excel spreadsheets. An example might include:

> o Calculation to estimate Grid-based garbage collection system [from Budget Options Report]

Publish Full Responses to Audits/Reviews/Recommendations
Where the office solicits administration response prior to publication, the office will publish full responses to audits/reviews/recommendations. By providing users access to the office's recommendations and the administration's response, the office can provide a window into the dialogue across and between governmental components. This will make the IGO and the administration more transparent and accountable to the public.

Provide Enhanced Access to References
> o Use hyperlinks wherever possible within documents
> o Use the social book-marking website, delicious, to bookmark references that the IGO uses in the course of performing program and policy reviews and audits. This will allow users to see the underlying research that informs our reports and make this information more accessible.

2. Publishing and linking to information about City government on the IGO's website

The office will enhance the transparency of City government by publishing or linking to previously unavailable public information about City government and operations on the IGO's website. As the goal of Open Chicago is to make City government more transparent, where appropriate, the IGO will ask the City departments responsible for public data to publish the data themselves. If City departments agree to these requests and publish the information in a manner that meets the Open Chicago criteria for true transparency, the IGO will simply link to this information on its website.

A primary goal of the initiative is to enable new applications and uses of data the City maintains. The publishing of previously unavailable public information will allow increased access and knowledge of the City's operations and allow independent developers to put information maintained by the City to new uses. Websites such as Everyblock are already demonstrating what can be done with this data.

Examples of public information the office will publish or link to include:

Financial Information
- Annually Appropriated Budget in Excel
- Annual Single Audits that Detail the Grant Funds the City Receives from the Federal Government

Human Resources Information
- Collective Bargaining Agreements
  - Police
  - Fire
  - AFSCME
  - Nurses
  - Public Safety
  - COUPE (Coalition of Union Public Employees) [Includes Teamsters, Laborers, and Operating Engineers]

3. Identifying best practices in transparency and accountability

One of the best ways to enhance transparency in Chicago is to learn from what other cities, counties, and states are doing. In the course of doing research for investigations, audits, and program reviews, the office often reviews the practices of other governments. By identifying what other governments are doing to enhance transparency and accountability, the office can help ensure that the City's efforts are being held to highest standards.

Here are two examples of initiatives the office might highlight:

Kansas Department of Transportation's T-Link Calculator
The Kansas Department of Transportation has developed an innovative budget calculator that lets Kansas residents and other interested users develop their own theoretical transportation

program. The calculator provides a window for users on the competing concerns and goals that must be balanced when developing the budget of a large government agency.
http://www.kansastlink.com/calculator/

New Mexico's Sunshine Portal
The State of New Mexico has designed a website to be the central portal for residents to view government spending and contracting information.
http://www.sunshineportalnm.com/

How to get involved
As the main goal of the Open Chicago Initiative is to enhance the public's understanding of and access to City government, it will be most successful with the active participation of City residents.   To that end, the office encourages the submission of ideas for what types of information the office should publish and any ideas you may have to make City government more accessible. Please send your suggestions, ideas, comments, questions, corrections, and criticisms to openchicago@chicagoinspectorgeneral.org or submit your ideas via the IGO's website.