

# Policy on Open Data for Guilford County

## Purpose

Guilford County supports exceptional customer experience through transparent and accessible governance, coordinated county communications, and enhanced citizen education efforts. This includes commitments to simplify access to information about county services and to proactively provide easily understandable analysis of that information where possible. The Open Data Policy outlines the steps the County will take to establish and maintain an open data program that responsibly advances transparency and accountability, connects with the community, and improves public services.

## Section 1: Definitions

- A. **“Data”** means statistical, factual, quantitative, or qualitative information that is maintained or created by or on behalf of a County agency. This definition is inclusive of software source code developed or maintained by or on behalf of the County.
- B. **“Dataset”** means a named collection of related records, with the collection containing data organized or formatted in a specific or prescribed way, often in tabular form.
- C. **“Legal encumbrance”** includes federal copyright protections and other, non-statutory legal limitations on how or under what conditions a dataset may be used. This definition is also inclusive of any software source code made available online (“open source software”).
- D. **“Open data”** means data that is available online, in an open format, with no legal encumbrances on use or reuse, and is available for all to access and download in full without fees or a requirement of registration.
- E. **“Open format”** means any widely accepted, nonproprietary, platform-independent, machine-readable data format, which permits automated processing of such data and facilitates analysis and search capabilities.
- F. **“Protected information”** means any dataset or portion thereof to which an agency may deny access pursuant to North Carolina General Statutes or any other law or rule or regulation.
- G. **“Publishable data”** means data which is not protected or sensitive and which has been prepared for release to the public.
- H. **“Sensitive information”** means any data which, if published by the County online, could raise privacy, confidentiality or security concerns or have the potential to jeopardize public health, safety or welfare to an extent that is greater than the potential public benefit of publishing that data.

## Section 2: Open Data Program

A. The County commits to develop and implement practices that will allow it to:

- a. Proactively release all publishable County data, making it freely available in appropriately varied and useful open formats, using an open license with no restrictions on use or reuse, and fully accessible to the broadest range of users to use for varying purposes;
- b. Publish high quality, updated data with documentation (metadata) and permanence to encourage maximum use;
- c. Provide or support access to free, historical archives of all released County data for as long as practically possible considering continued relevance of the data, record retention requirements, and cost.
- d. Measure the effectiveness of datasets made available through the Open Data Program by connecting open data efforts to the County's programmatic priorities;
- e. Minimize limitations on the disclosure of public information while appropriately safeguarding protected and sensitive information; and
- f. Support innovative uses of the County's publishable data by agencies, the public, and other partners.
- g. Actively engage in cooperative efforts to coordinate the collection, analysis and reporting of publishable data produced by the County and partner organizations to enhance understanding of community strengths and weaknesses, reduce duplications of effort and improve public services.

B. The development and implementation of these practices shall be overseen by the Open Data Team.

C. The requirements of this policy shall apply to any County department, office, administrative unit, commission, board, advisory committee or other division of County government ("agency"), including data that may be received from third party agency contractors that can be considered public information and is not otherwise use restricted, where applicable.

D. Appropriate funding shall be made available to achieve the goals of this program.

## Section 3: Governance

- A. Implementation of the Open Data Program will be overseen by the Open Data Team, which will work with the County's departments and agencies to:
- a. Identify and publish appropriate contact information for a lead open data coordinator for each County agency who will be responsible for managing that agency's participation in the Open Data Program;
  - b. Oversee the creation of a comprehensive inventory of datasets held by each County agency which is published to the central open data location and is regularly updated;
  - c. Develop and implement a process for determining the relative level of risk and public benefit associated with potentially sensitive, non-protected information to decide whether and how to publish it;
  - d. Develop and implement a process for prioritizing the release of datasets which considers new and existing signals of interest from the public (such as the frequency of public records requests), the County's programmatic priorities, existing opportunities for data use in the public interest, cost, and potential positive and negative consequences.
  - e. Proactively consult with members of the public, agency staff, journalists, researchers, and other stakeholders to identify the datasets which will have the greatest benefit to County residents if published in a high-quality manner;
  - f. Establish appropriate data security procedures for the open data project and processes for publishing datasets to the central open data location, including processes for ensuring that datasets are high quality, up-to-date, are in use-appropriate formats, and exclude protected and sensitive information;
  - g. Ensure that appropriate metadata is provided for each dataset to facilitate its use;
  - h. Develop and oversee a routinely updated, public timeline for new dataset publication;
  - i. Make recommendations for historical document inclusion and define a schedule for approved historical document publication; and
  - j. Ensure that published datasets are available for bulk download and/or available via public application programming interfaces (APIs) without legal encumbrance.

- B. To increase and improve use of the County's open data, the Open Data Team will actively encourage agency and public participation through providing regular opportunities for feedback and collaboration.

## Section 4: Central Online Location for Published Data

- A. The County will create and maintain a publicly available location on the County's website or in another suitable online location where the County's published data will be available for download.
- B. Published datasets shall be placed into the public domain. Dedicating datasets to the public domain means that there are no restrictions or requirements placed on use of these datasets.
- C. Each published dataset should be associated with contact information for the appropriate manager of that dataset as well as with a file layout or data dictionary that provides information about field labels and values.

## Section 5: Open Data Report and Review

- A. Within one year of the effective date of this policy, and thereafter no later than June 30 of each year, the Open Data Team shall publish an annual Open Data Report. The report shall include an assessment of progress towards achievement of the goals of the County's Open Data Program, an assessment of how the County's open data work has furthered or will further the County's programmatic priorities, and a description and publication timeline for datasets envisioned to be published by the County in the following year.
- B. During the review and reporting period, the Open Data Team should also make suggestions for improving the County's open data management processes to ensure that the County continues to move towards the achievement of the policy's goals.