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What's New in Civic Tech: WaTech Launches GIS Data Portal

Plus, a data competition aims to reduce Indiana's infant mortality rate; Code for America's GetCalFresh program works to reach eligible self-employed residents; and Louisiana has a new Medicaid enrollment app.

BY ZACK QUAINANCE / OCTOBER 24, 2019

Washington Technology Solutions (WaTech), which is that state's tech services agency, has launched a new open data geo portal.

This project, which is fittingly called the [Washington Geospatial Open Data Portal](#), is the result of a multi-agency effort. In a [press release](#) announcing its launch, officials noted that this comprehensive set of geographic data about the state had “culled several terabytes of storage housed in the state's data center.”

What that means in a practical sense is that users — be they trained data scientists, activists or just folks who are curious — can now quickly and efficiently find information such as the number locations of dairies in the state (complete with their sizes), where Washington's most dangerous natural hazards lie or simpler information, like the location of all of Washington's airports.

This portal, the state notes, is simply “tracking millions of bits of geographic data that help tell the story about where we live.”

The project is managed by the Geospatial Program, which is housed within WaTech's Office of the Chief Information Officer. It is a centralization largely of information collected and published by county, city and state agency geographic information system professionals. In short, this portal creates a singular, authoritative source of information taken from a wide variety of public sources.

That comprehensive and thorough centralization, which is always a challenge in government due to disparate silos and other factors, is perhaps the most impressive facet of this project. Washington's Geographic Information

Technology Committee itself is a prime example of this sort of centralization of multi-agency resources.

The wide-spanning information on the portal can benefit a wide-range of users, from hunters looking to find boundaries, to real estate agents in search of land value info, to emergency managers engaged with disaster planning.

Moving forward, there are plans to continue expanding the data sets of the portal in 2020.

DATA COMPETITION AIMS TO REDUCE INDIANA'S INFANT MORTALITY RATE

A data competition in Indiana recently announced winning projects aimed at reducing the infant mortality rate in that state.

Winners of the Healthy Mom + Baby Datapalooza were announced earlier this month. The competition was coordinated by the Indiana chapter of the Healthcare Information Management Systems Society in collaboration with the Indiana Family and Social Services Administration, the Indiana State Department of Health, the Indiana Management Performance Hub, the Regenstrief Institute and KSM Consulting.

The goal was for winning teams to create “innovative solutions to visualize and analyze maternal and infant health data,” organizers noted in a press release.

Winning teams were selected in two categories, one for professionals and one for students. The professional category winners were Ingrid Arreola and Aubrey Xiong, who developed a project that compared maternal and infant mortality trends across Midwestern states, Indiana itself and counties within Indiana.

The winner of first prize for students was the Health Infrastructures and Learning Systems (HILS) Crew from the University of Michigan. That group worked to visualize local risk profiles based on maternal health measures and community-level health indicators.

In total, more than 20 teams from three states and six universities participated, doing work that used de-identified maternal health and infant maternity data from the Indiana Management Performance Hub.

More information about the challenge as well as the work that was done by the winners in each category can [be found here](#).

LOUISIANA MEDICAID ENROLLMENT APP TOUTS FIRST-YEAR SUCCESS

Users for the Healthy Louisiana app, which is that state's mobile-friendly Medicaid enrollment app, doubled year over year from the app's first year to its second year, the app's developer announced in a [recent press release](#).

The press release also notes that the app "continues to outnumber more traditional enrollment channels such as paper and telephone." Healthy Louisiana, which was designed by [MAXIMUS](#) and first launched in 2017, was touted at the time as the first mobile Medicaid enrollment app in the country.

The benefits of having an app like this are many, including getting an enrollment option that is available at any time. Healthy Louisiana gives users the chance to also compare health plans and look for providers before making their enrollment selections on their mobile devices.

Other features include being able to use both English and Spanish, creating single login user profiles and an FAQ/help section. A modernized website accompanies the app for users who prefer desktop to mobile.

GETCALFRESH PROJECT WORKS TO REACH SELF-EMPLOYED RESIDENTS

GetCalFresh, which is a Code for America initiative aimed at helping all eligible people get access to food assistance benefits, recently published [an account](#) of their efforts to reach the self-employed.

The crux of this new publication is, as the members of GetCalFresh note, that even when people are considered self-employed within the context of California's food assistance program.

“Many people who apply for CalFresh are trying to make ends meet by cobbling together gigs, side jobs, or occasional work,” they wrote.

“Increasingly, they might drive for ride-sharing companies, deliver food or goods, or do remote or Web-based freelance work.”

The post goes on to detail recent work and research that was done with the goal of improving GetCalFresh's application to help those who fill out determine whether they are considered self-employed by CalFresh's standards. What follows is a detailed and fascinating account of work they did, including statistics, descriptions of experiments and insight into the type of human-centered design that in recent years has begun to really drive pretty much all successful civic tech projects.

Interested parties can find the [full report here](#).

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