OpenAustin

CANDIDATE QUESTIONNAIRE

2012 Municipal Election

>>> We would be grateful to receive your response by Friday, April 27th

OpenAustin Point-of-Contact for Candidate Questionnaire:

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OpenAustin Candidate Questionnaire

Instructions: Please provide an answer for each of the following seven questions.

You can view candidate responses to OpenAustin's 2011 questionnaire [here](#).

Completed questionnaires will featured in **a paid search engine campaign** and will also be posted online at our website and disseminated through email and social media.

2012 Questions

1. Will you encourage City departments to place useful data on the open data portal on a timely basis? If so, how will you do this?

2. How do you and/or your staff view the value of social media in promoting citizen engagement and service delivery? What has been your experience with social media?

3. What steps (if any) will you take to address the needs of community groups and concerned citizens seeking to improve website usability, identify missing content, and enhance the information richness of the City's website?

4. Do you support studying whether Austin should join cities such as Seattle, Portland, San Francisco, and Washington, D.C. in pledging support for a publicly-accessible open-standard protocol for 311 services, such as the currently proposed Open311 API specification? Please consult Appendix A for more information.

5. Do you support the designation of a Director of Digital Innovation to be accountable for innovation with the City's digital portfolio (e.g. website, open data, civic applications, open government technology)? Please consult the following [article](#) for further information of this type of public servant position.

6. San Francisco and Philadelphia have Innovation Offices led by a Chief Innovation Officer. Boston has the [Urban Mechanics](#) program. New York City has a [Chief Digital Officer and a Digital Roadmap](#). Which of combination (if any) of these organizational approaches do you believe will best encourage digital innovation for Austin?

7. Do you believe the current level of budgetary resources allocated towards City information technology is sufficient? What should be the City's IT priorities?

Appendix A – Open311

What's Open311?

When a resident contacts a conventional 311 call center, or sends and email to that center, the information conveyed in that communication is likely to be maintained in a closed database. So, if several neighbors call in about a similar problem (e.g. a pothole) they wouldn't have a way of knowing of each other's request. Moreover - to continue with the pothole example - the local neighborhood organizations would need to go through a cumbersome information request process to get aggregated neighborhood information. And if a civic-minded Austin developer wanted to customize a highly-regarded application tracking pothole issues developed in a different city, they themselves would have to figure out the way that Austin organizes its 311 data relative to the other city where the application was developed. And of course, said developer would also have to go through a cumbersome process to get the data.

Open311 is an effort to create a standard way of organizing the data, as well as access to the data, to solve some of the issues raised above. It helps organize the information in way that makes it easy for the creation of software that enables a resident or neighborhood organization to see what issues are being reported and engaged upon in their area. It simplifies the provision of information for external analysis and application development. And it helps make the tools created by Austin applicable in other communities that follow the standard. When a developer creates a new application to work with San Francisco's 311 system, it would also work with Austin's system. Further, just as one can chose among many different web email applications and many different web browsers, one should be able to choose (or to create) the best application to interact with Austin's city services. These same benefits also apply to city managers. An open standard allows their internal systems to be more interoperable and it doesn't lock them into any one system.

Why should Austin study the benefits and feasibility of local implementation?

The most developed function of Open311 technologies in other communities is to report and track non-emergency issues in public space such as potholes, broken streetlights, garbage, vandalism, and other problems that compromise public spaces and infrastructure. Using a mobile device or a computer, someone can enter information (ideally with a photo) about a problem at a given location. This report is then routed to the relevant authority to address the problem. What's different from a traditional 311 report is that this information is available for anyone to see and it allows anyone to contribute more information. By enabling collaboration on these issues, the open model makes it easier to collect and organize more information about important problems. By making the information public, it provides

transparency and accountability for those responsible for the problem. Transparency also ensures that everyone's voice is heard and in-turn encourages more participation.

Many of Austin's peer cities have begun to run open government initiatives that open up 311 data; cities like Washington D.C. and San Francisco have begun to open up Application Programming Interfaces (APIs) to provide richer access to their data systems. An API allows citizens' applications to interact with the same data that a city uses internally and to not only read data, but to query live data and even submit new information. This concept of a read/write API is what has fueled the growth of many new technologies, providing whole software ecosystems around platforms like Twitter and the iPhone. A read/write API is a prerequisite for allowing new Open311 applications and mash-ups to fully interact with a city's 311 system. A standard would be extremely helpful to boosting the impact of all of this work. Austin can be a leader in this area, providing benefits to our residents and those of other communities.