City of Philadelphia

Data Service Standards

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Purpose

The City of Philadelphia's ("the City") Data Service Standards (DSS) aim to enhance the availability, quality, and use of City data to support informed decision-making, transparency, and public engagement. By establishing clear guidelines, the DSS ensure that data services are accessible, reliable, secure, and ethical, ultimately informing and improving public services and fostering trust between the City and its residents. Furthermore, by making data services more open and usable, individuals and various stakeholders – businesses, nonprofits, community groups, researchers, and others – can leverage them to drive innovation, advocate for change, and create solutions that contribute to a stronger, more connected Philadelphia.

This document is designed to create awareness and knowledge of the high-level best practices in the design and delivery of data services in the City of Philadelphia. It is intended to align the City's data services to Mayor Parker's vision to make Philadelphia the safest, cleanest, and greenest big city in the nation, with economic opportunity for all.

Data Service Standards

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What is a Data Service Standard?

Well-managed cities use data to deliver services and solve problems. Data services can inform policy decisions, guide allocation of funding, improve services, evaluate the effectiveness of programs, and engage residents. Most concretely, data services can include internal and external infrastructure and resources such as:

- apps for finding city services,
- dashboards and visualizations,
- performance and transparency tools,
- publicly shared open datasets, metadata and an open data portal,
- data engineering and extract, transform, load (ETL) data pipelines,
- internal data integration and sharing tools,
- Right-to-Know request services,
- data support services,
- workshops, trainings, and more.

Data services are designed with an understanding of **who the users are**. Data service *standards* explain what "good" looks like for high-quality data services provided to end users.

Data Service Standards

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Values driving the standards

At the core of the City of Philadelphia's approach to data services are values that guide how we design, deliver, and improve our work. These values ensure that data serves as a powerful tool for decision-making, transparency, and the public good.

Equity

Philadelphia and many of its communities face significant challenges. Poverty, crime, access to healthcare, and other core issues impact residents' quality of life, making it essential that data is used to drive meaningful improvements for all residents and especially those most vulnerable. Our goal is to make City data and services accessible to all, with a focus on removing barriers and creating opportunities for historically underserved communities. We prioritize the creation of data services that help bridge digital divides, inform equitable policy decisions, and empower residents to advocate for their needs.

Transparency

Trust is built through openness, accountability, and high-quality, accessible services. We are committed to making City data available clearly, efficiently, and regularly, ensuring that users can access the information they need. By proactively publishing data services, we enable Philadelphians to more easily use and understand government services.

We make high-quality data services transparent by sharing details of their development and publication, providing opportunities for user feedback, and making a deliberate effort to incorporate that feedback.

Systems thinking

Data services should not exist in isolation – they should be built comprehensively as part of a well-connected ecosystem. Data service design is first informed by mixed method research. This includes the use of analytics, qualitative user research, and quantitative analysis of surveys and right to know requests. For example, when we release open datasets, we do so with the goal of making them useful for a variety of audiences and users. We take a comprehensive approach by ensuring that data is not only available but also accessible and actionable. This means creating interactive dashboards that provide insights, developing finder apps that improve access to City services, and using data to drive internal performance improvements. By integrating data across multiple platforms

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and purposes, we maximize its value for the public and City operations. Building comprehensively also supports equity by ensuring data accessibility for audiences beyond those who are technical or data savvy.

Collaboration

Strong data services are built through partnership. Data services are built by City departments and with community organizations, researchers, residents and others to ensure that they meet real needs. By actively listening to feedback and engaging with diverse stakeholders, we create data services that are practical, innovative, and responsive to Philadelphia's unique challenges. We also provide guidance and best practices for data management, helping teams across the City use data effectively and ethically.

Impact

Data services are designed to be used, create value, and make a positive impact. High-quality data services maximize the value created for their users – both within City government and for the public. High value data services align to and support the City's business processes (e.g., procurement, finance, staffing), improving operations in ways that result in better service delivery. Data services should help lead to tangible benefits for residents that create access to economic opportunity, increase public safety, support healthy communities, and improve overall quality of life.

Through these values, we aim to create a more connected, informed, and engaged Philadelphia—where data empowers both government and residents to access information, make better decisions and drive meaningful change.

Data Service Standards

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Data Service Standards

High-quality data services meet the following minimum standards.

1. Understand data users' needs

Why it is important: Assessing the needs of data users ensures that the services provided are relevant and useful. It also informs project prioritization when navigating resource and capacity constraints.

What it means: Collecting feedback and insights into what users need and want from our data services through multiple channels. Both early in the design of a service, and on a regular basis, the City can:

- use guidance from the [Equitable Community Engagement Toolkit](#) when collecting input from communities about data services;
- administer periodic surveys of end users;
- use citywide demographic data to support the inclusion of diverse users; and
- build upon existing engagement efforts to include a broader audience in data services design.

2. Leverage data and digital standards to increase usability

Why it is important: Existing City standards for data and digital services ensure the accuracy and comparability of data across departments and the usability of data services.

What it means: Whenever possible, create data services that align to citywide property and address information, administrative, and other data standards:

- Data services delivered within phila.gov should meet the City's digital services standards[1] that define the best practices for City-owned web content, design, and technology.
- Develop applications ('Finder Apps') that allow residents to use data to complete critical tasks (e.g., primary care finder, recycling donation centers, and the free meal finder) and that leverage systems like the City's Addressing Information System to standardize data.

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[1] https://standards.phila.gov

Data Service Standards

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- Metadata on data services are created and up to date in the [City's metadata catalog](#).
- Implement tools that are fully compatible with assistive technologies to ensure inclusiveness for all users. When using third-party tools beyond the City's direct control, such as vendor-provided solutions, actively advocate for accessibility and inclusive design.

3. Ensure data access

Why it is important: Ensuring data is accessible, promotes transparency, and allows for broader public engagement.

What it means: The City is taking accessibility into account in the design and implementation of data and data services. Building on the [2012 Open Data Executive Order](#), data services will prioritize publication in open formats that can be "retrieved, downloaded, indexed, searched and reused by commonly used web search applications and software" without restrictions that would impede re-use of the information. This can include, but is not limited to, the City working to:

- Release open data on a variety of topics to ensure they meet the needs of diverse stakeholders such as community advocates, nonprofits, businesses, researchers, civic technologists, data journalists and others.
- Broaden the audience of data consumers by creating data visualizations that complement the release of raw open datasets (e.g., [Campaign Finance dashboard](#), [Language Services Usage dashboard, Language Services Usage dashboard](#), and the [Workforce Diversity dashboard](#)).

4. Ensure privacy and safety

Why it is important: Data services are designed and implemented in ways that ensure privacy and safety, including protections against bias or misuse.

What it means: In addition to data being collected and published in an ethical way, data services built by the City will:

- respect the privacy of the original data sources, including, for example, resident or business interactions with the City (e.g., property or tax information).
- be designed to take into account potential bias in the data, and if they may be present, provide appropriate disclosures and any important context; and

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- guard against misuse that could impact residents, businesses, communities, City staff, or other groups.

5. Maintain data quality and regular updates

Why it is important: High-quality, up-to-date data is essential for accurate analysis and decision-making.

What it means: Maintaining data quality across City government requires multiple key systems and procedures to be followed with fidelity. These include:

- Increased, consistent, cross-departmental use of Databridge, the City's enterprise data ecosystem, by all City departments. Databridge provides a robust and efficient technical environment for authoritative data.
- Establish and enforce data quality standards: Identify data stewards and a department leader for all departments to ensure that shared data is accurate, relevant, and regularly updated, maintaining reliability for all users.
- Iterative service development: Continuously improve data and analytics quality, evolving tools based on user feedback.

6. Encourage collaboration and community use of City data

Why it is important: Engaging with the community and collaborating across departments enhances the effectiveness of data services.

What it means: High quality data services are greater than the sum of their parts. By modeling these standards in their design, development, and publication, high-quality data services inspire new ideas and feedback. Collaboration within the City and engagement with diverse stakeholders and communities can:

- inspire new ideas for services or changes to existing services. Quality begets quality;
- increase the number of users of City data services. Data services will be more effective and used by more people when we are intentional about how we publish data services centered on users; and
- encourage public participation in data initiatives through workshops, trainings, and focus groups.

Data Service Standards

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How to contribute

The Office of Innovation and Technology (OIT) is leading the work to build, launch, and maintain these data service standards in partnership with the Mayor's Office of Policy Planning and Delivery (OPPD). Changes to the Data Service Standards will be made as new information is obtained, errors or gaps are identified, and as users provide recommendations to City data governance groups. Any feedback on this document should be emailed to maps@phila.gov.

Revision History

Date	Version	Changes Incorporated
7/14/2025	1.0	Initial version