Municipal Data Governance Builds Trust and Transparency

In August 2021, Kathy Hochul took office as the governor of New York state. In a bid to rebuild public trust after Andrew Cuomo's tumultuous administration, Hochul quickly launched a transparency initiative. This initiative once again focuses attention on the critical importance of municipal data governance.

Municipal Governments and the Data Challenge

Municipal governments face a number of challenges to achieving data transparency. Limited personnel and tight budgets top the list. Information silos and poor data quality compound the problem. And poor communication between departments results in duplicates and incomplete or inaccurate data.

Mismanaged data in turn results in flawed decision-making, public distrust, information bottlenecks and difficulty achieving regulatory compliance. For example, a nonprofit in New York that assists with public records requests paints a dismal picture. Just 28 percent of records requests were honored, and requestors waited months on average to receive their records.

Benefits of Municipal Data Governance

However, many municipal governments have risen to the challenge and demonstrate the benefits of solid data governance. For example, the city of Buffalo, NY launched an open data initiative in 2018 with goals to promote public trust and drive efficiency. By implementing sound data governance practices, governments like Buffalo realize key benefits, such as the following.

- **Streamline [public records requests](#)** – A solid data governance strategy combines automated ePolicies with effective data categorization and eDiscovery management. Such a strategy removes bottlenecks, making it possible to find and disseminate requested information in a fraction of the time.

- **Drive efficiency by eliminating data silos** – Too often, departments within the same agency fail to communicate effectively. This results in overlapping datasets and delays. On the other hand, centralized data governance eliminates duplicates, improves data quality, saves time, and yields increased access to valuable information.

- **Improve decision making** – Inaccurate or incomplete data results in poor strategies, impacting both the budget and public opinion. As the adage goes: garbage in, garbage out. However, with up-to-date, clean data in hand, leaders have the tools necessary to make solid decisions now and drive future innovation.

- **Achieve regulatory compliance** – Municipal governments must adhere to stringent regulatory controls that mandate scrupulous attention to data security, transparency, and privacy. With a focus on properly organizing and securing data, a robust data governance program takes the pain out of compliance.

- **Build public trust** – When governments respond quickly to public records requests and demonstrate good data stewardship, the public notices. And when governments fail to deliver accurate, timely information, the public also notices.

Municipal Data Governance Best Practices

By taking a proactive approach to data governance, municipal governments can achieve dual objectives of regulatory compliance and innovation. They begin by knowing where data resides and who owns it.

This involves gathering key stakeholders from various departments. Buy-in from across the organization also helps to break down information silos.

With key stakeholders on board, the agency can determine a plan. Because data governance affects workflows, organizations often find success by beginning with smaller pilot projects and then expanding. Choose a project that will deliver results relatively quickly, demonstrating the benefits and gathering support.

Additionally, any successful data governance program needs to include a focus on basic cyber security and privacy. Citizens trust government agencies with their personal information. Protecting sensitive data ensures that the right people have access to the right data, and that unauthorized persons do not.

Automation facilitates the data governance process. By implementing ePolicies for data retention and appropriate data sharing, for instance, organizations reduce the risk of human error.

Partner with Data Governance Specialists

The consultants at Messaging Architects have worked with municipalities across the country to build cost-efficient data governance strategies. With proven tools and deep expertise, we can help your organization streamline records management, strengthen data security, and implement data compliance monitoring.