PRIMER #7:

FOSTERING PUBLIC DATA COMPETENCE

Engaging citizens to promote wider use of data informed by local contexts and priorities

WHY

Facilitating greater data competence within the general public is an important step to ensuring that it could receive greater benefits from data re-use, as well as face fewer risks from it as data subjects. To advance full participation of the general public in data efforts there is a need to foster its data competence, going beyond the fundamental need for data literacy. This will help to bridge the gap between the public and the data ecosystem so that the public could both participate in and contribute to data efforts. This approach can provide the means necessary to address the persisting differences in power in the current data and digital era, as well as guarantee novel productive capacity while enabling creativity. Consequently, empowering the public to see itself as a producer of data, will put it in the 'position to negotiate' the ways in which data is re-used by different stakeholders.

HOW

Obtaining a Social License: Trust and legitimacy are key in the planning processes pertaining to data re-use. In order to ensure that data re-use initiatives create public good, they need to obtain a 'social license'. This means exercising the necessary due diligence and engaging with all relevant stakeholders to ensure that data re-use is aligned with public and stakeholder concerns and expectations. To make sure that data and technology are used responsibly, it is important that both the benefits and the risks associated with them are evaluated by local stakeholders.

Contributing to the Public Knowledge Base: Addressing modern challenges requires more than just basic digital literacy, but data competence. Organizations can support

efforts to foster public data competence by making not just data accessible, but also supporting documentation such as data dictionaries, glossaries and nutritional labels for data, and using plain language rather than jargon when communicating insights and lessons learned to the public.

Taking a People-Led Approach to Engagement: Taking a people-led approach means engaging in problem-solving processes that are centered around people and groups who organize and mobilize them. The approach consists of four phases: defining problems, definitions and priorities; ideating solutions by engaging with experts and leveraging data; experimenting and testing the solutions; and finally, expanding impact by sharing relevant lessons learned with others who may benefit from them. Some of the different types and groups of people which could be engaged under this approach include residents, domain experts, NGOs, community-based organizations, local business owners, anchor institutions, resource partners, and municipal government officials and civil servants.

MORE

How can stakeholder engagement and mini-publics better inform the use of data for pandemic response?: A piece written by The GovLab for the OECD's Participo blog explaining how The GovLab has used mini-publics to engage residents of New York on data re-use amid crisis events.

Data Infrastructure Literacy: A Big Data & Society paper which highlights the importance of digital literacy for public engagement with data infrastructures.

Data Literacy: In this State of Open Data chapter, Mariel Garcia Montes and Dirk Slater discuss the importance of data literacy in achieving organizational data maturity and realizing the full potential of open data.

People-Led Innovation: A series of tools, probing questions, and inspirational examples aimed at providing practitioners with a flexible guidebook for experimenting with new ways to solve public problems in an iterative, participatory manner.

Beyond Data Literacy: A Data-Pop Alliance white paper that outlines strategies for inclusive engagement and empowering individuals to effectively navigate their data and information ecosystems.