

The City of Toronto and Ryerson University

OPEN GOVERNMENT

IN OPENSACES



Highlights from Open Government in OpenSpaces

October 27, 2015

Peter Bronfman Learning Centre at
Ryerson University

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OpenSpaces Quick Facts

- OpenSpaces was a discussion forum on [Open Government](#) in the City of Toronto.
- The October 27, 2015 half-day event was co-hosted by City of Toronto and Ryerson University at Heaslip House.
- Over 50 participants attended from academia, government, institutions and civil society groups.
- The forum featured a 'Question and Answer' interview with the City Manager, Peter Wallace, and Dr. Pamela Robinson, Ryerson University's co-sponsor.
- Small group discussions focused on two topics: the 'Challenges of Open Government', and 'What Toronto can do to be a more "open" City'.
- To support discussion, infographic style summaries of two [City of Toronto Open Government Resident and Staff survey results](#) were available to participants. Following the OpenSpaces event, the survey results (in infographic format and in raw open dataset format) were publicly available.
- Discussions wrapped up with a short message from the City of Toronto co-sponsor, City Clerk, Ulli Watkiss. The City Clerk then invited all participants to offer comments and conclusions.

Foreword by Dr. Pamela Robinson, Ryerson University co-sponsor

The planning for the Open Government in OpenSpaces event in April, 2015. The objective was to bring together leading academics, senior City staff and civic society leaders. It is quite amazing to trace the evolution of the event. Where we started and where the event ended up were two quite different events. Over the six months of planning I was encouraged and excited by the creative and open thinking the City of Toronto colleagues brought to the planning process.

The staff and public open government surveys give all of us some real food for thought and a baseline data set against which to measure future progress. The new City Manager, Peter Wallace, brings his leadership at a time when it is clear tough decisions are coming. In the next twelve months the pillars of open government – transparency, accountability, participation, and accessibility – are needed to support city-wide discussions about how we can move forward in a time of fiscal constraint.

The table discussions at this OpenSpaces event clearly demonstrated to me the opportunities and challenges of thinking big and keeping it real. It's easy to talk about being open. But actually being and governing open requires deliberate and intentional work. People shared great ideas, asked hard questions and showed real commitment to making things more open.

From the leadership of the City Clerk to the everyday practice of staff inside City Hall, the culture of open government is taking hold in the City of Toronto. Openly governing Canada's largest and most diverse city is no easy task but it is clear to me, after the OpenSpaces events, that Toronto senior staff are all ready and willing to tackle this challenge head-on.

Thank you so much for the opportunity to collaborate and learn with you enroute.

Yours Truly,

Dr. Pamela Robinson MCIP RPP
School of Urban and Regional Planning
Ryerson University

Message from Ulli Watkiss, City Clerk and co-sponsor

As City Clerk and chair of the cross-corporate, senior management Open Government Committee, I was pleased to co-sponsor OpenSpaces. Senior City staff, academics, private sector institutions and civic society engaged in frank conversations, shared thoughtful insights and tabled stimulating ideas.

I hope that event participants recognize and agree with our choice of 'Highlight' excerpts from the OpenSpaces discussions. For readers unfamiliar with the forum, I hope that the 'Highlights' convey the constructive spirit that prevailed that day: the energy and commitment to make the City a more open place.

The OpenSpaces event also coincided with the public release of the results of two City of Toronto [Open Government surveys](#) (for Residents and City staff).

The OpenSpaces discussions and the survey results crystalized some key messages for me. Moving forward, the City of Toronto needs to:

- **Communicate, Communicate, Communicate:** Tell our Open Government story better – explain to the public what is already available and provide more effective ways for the public to find information relevant to them.
- **Listen and Partner:** Listen better to residents on the issues they face and partner with them to implement innovative solutions.
- **Invest in People:** Build stronger "trusted spaces" to encourage data sharing, collaboration and innovation among staff and with the public. Help staff recognize that Open Government is just part of their day-to-day work.
- **Ensure that City Organization and Processes Keep Pace with Public Expectations:** Transform our organizational culture and processes so we can be more nimble when embracing new and disruptive technologies or implementing new business models like the share economy.

We welcome your feedback; email us at infomgmt@toronto.ca.

Yours truly,

Ulli Watkiss
City Clerk
City of Toronto

Highlights from 'Questions & Answers' with City Manager Peter Wallace and Dr. Pamela Robinson, Ryerson University



OpenSpaces began with a frank and engaging 'Q & A' between Dr. Pamela Robinson and Toronto's City Manager, Peter Wallace.

The City Manager shared his thoughts and perspectives on a wide range of Open Government issues.

What Open Government means

Dr. Robinson: What does it mean to be an Open Government?

City Manager excerpts:

- "The key to Open Government is understanding the public interest and having positive impacts in Toronto's communities."
- "Open Government is the mechanism through which the public understands what the City is doing, and about having accountability. This means that the City has to behave in a way, in which the public has a right to access all that the City does, with only a few exceptions, as the public has a right to understand why the City does what it does."
- "Municipalities are more open than other levels of government."

DID YOU KNOW?

There is no municipal 'cabinet secrecy'. Only about 4% of City of Toronto Council agenda items are held 'in camera'.

Transforming the City organizational culture to a more Open Government

Dr. Robinson: What are the city's best assets for being open and what are some of the bigger challenges?

City Manager excerpts:

- "Open Government is made up of two constructs:"
 - "First, it's about understanding what information the City has, and engaging with the public and understanding their needs."
 - "Second, it's about adopting a dynamic approach – using social, enabling technologies. And addressing the Human Resources challenge of age and demographics. It's about transforming a stable, static organization into a dynamic one that's attractive to youth."
- "Open Government is more than Open Data. The City has to look at different ways of delivering services e.g. what's the most open, democratic ways of delivering services?"
- "There needs to be a fundamental shift – we need people who can exemplify what it is to be an open government. For example, take the application development community; it's grass roots, organic. They are not driven from the top. But change needs to be fostered from the top. It's an all-encompassing change."
- "The City has to examine the public service outcome that we are trying to deliver. What are the organizational constraints that contribute to that? For example, do we just deliver transportation like buses? Or does the City become more innovative and really think about how we position the City in the broader context of the types of services it needs to provide?"

DID YOU KNOW?

TTC publishes open data vehicle schedules. Public developers create mobile apps that provide the latest transit schedules; riders can plan their routes and commutes.

DID YOU KNOW?

The City is collaborating with the University of Toronto on the impact of 'driverless vehicles'. The initiative focuses broadly on Urban Design, not just Transportation.

Relationships between the City, Civil Society, Universities and Institutions



Dr. Robinson: Open government is sometimes framed as government needing to be responsive to changing contexts for governance – in order for this responsiveness to really work, government needs to be able read the signals of change. Let's talk about the signals that are easy to receive and the ones that are more elusive.

How does the open government mandate change the way the City interacts with people from civil society groups and universities and colleges?

City Manager excerpts:

- "Civic society will make us more accountable and ensure we provide better services."
- "Universities are sources of talent that the City should be linking to. They represent huge opportunities to develop internships, apprenticeships, as well as learning programs and initiatives. The City's ability to reinvent itself will depend on talent and to transform itself through hiring."

Table Discussion Highlights

Many lively conversations took place at 'OpenSpaces', as academics, civil society leaders and city staff engaged in thought provoking discussions on Open Government.

To stimulate discussion, each table of participants used the two City of Toronto Open Government Surveys (to focus on two questions):

1. What does it mean to be an Open Government?
2. Toward an Open Government: Priorities, Next Steps and what Toronto can do to be a more "open" City.

The discussion highlights are grouped into "Challenges and Barriers" and "Opportunities and Ideas."

Challenges and Barriers

- A key challenge in the organization is size; there are so few staff actively working in Open Government.
- The idea above was challenged – All staff, from front-line staff to policy and research staff, work in civic engagement, regardless of their job title.
- A challenge is operationalizing Open Government from senior levels to front line staff. There needs to be broader engagement and understanding of what Open government means. Mandatory training is required.
- While Open Government is not a new topic, staff do not understand how their roles and work responsibilities fit into the broader Open Government picture.
- There is a need for balance between legislative privacy requirements and openness. Staff need an understanding of the lines in this balance in order to feel empowered in a risk-averse organization.
- Open Data is one part of the Open Government story. A heavy focus on Open Data enforces a narrower scope on the innovation that can result from pursuing a wider view of Open Government.

Opportunities and Ideas

- The City has the right solutions and answers, but it has to do a better job in communicating them to staff and the general public.
- For instance, finding information on the City of Toronto's website is challenging, and requires using a search engine.
- The City needs to do a better job in delivering its messages either through social media or other channels. In order to do this, the technology the City utilizes has to improve.



- The City could build a campaign around Open Government.
- The campaign would encompass education and training of staff on Open Government, celebrating successes, and recognizing achievements of innovative public servants that take risks – this encourages leadership.
- Government work has become increasingly collaborative in nature. Therefore, the City needs to build more partnerships with non-profits. This will lead to stronger, more dynamic, and lasting relationships between non-profits and the City, which leverage each other's strengths.
- The City needs to examine current processes and learn to work together more efficiently to deliver better services – ample room for opportunity and improvement.

- The City needs to think of more innovative ways in which to engage the public.
 - For instance, pop-up consultations, where the City Planner visits events and fields consultations when people are not necessarily prepared in advance fosters a different kind of consultation.

Participants – Thoughts and Questions



Following her brief closing remarks, the City Clerk opened up the floor for participants to question, share insights and raise ideas.

The highlights include:

- Open but not accessible: the City's Budget report is available on the website, but it takes effort to navigate to it. At a 1,000 pages it is not easy to understand.
- Create an Open Government video that Divisions can use to communicate to staff.
- In terms of Open Government, are there new tools to reach out to disadvantaged groups?

- How can the City measure the performance of Open Government? What are the challenges involved in doing so?
- The City needs to publically make the case for why Open Government programs and services matter. This can help senior management to see the value in increasing resources for these programs.
- Open Government is about reaching people in government; who can the public call?
- Create competition among City Divisions to see who can release the most Open Data sets.
- Open Data – Releasing data is not enough; data needs to be accessible and useable.

DID YOU KNOW?

Making Open Data more accessible and usable can be accomplished with greater access to visualization (e.g. graphing, mapping) tools to understand raw open data. Maps are a powerful way to contextualize information.



Conclusion

Open Government in OpenSpaces 2015 was a great opportunity for academic, municipal, and civic society leaders to acknowledge challenges, share ideas and even doing a little visioning. But it was not an isolated event. It was part of a continuum of Open Government conversations that the City of Toronto has been curating, under the City Clerk's Office leadership. Since 2013, the City has:

- co-sponsored an Open Government conference with MaRS, the City of Guelph and the Government of Ontario, a first of its kind.
- established a pan-Canadian, public sector Open Government Community of Practice.
- organized several Open Government workshops and conferences for City staff.

These forums, like the OpenSpaces conference, were designed to be "trusted spaces" for staff to learn more about opening up aspects of their daily work, to share experiences, to assess the challenges they face, and to have the confidence to incubate ideas to open up government.

The City of Toronto is committed to advancing Open Government. For example, in the period following the OpenSpaces event,

- The Open Data (toronto.ca/open) catalog reached more than 200 high value datasets.
- The City Clerk's Office held a workshop styled after OpenSpaces for over 100 staff with participation from Ryerson University's Dr. Robinson, Dr. Johns and some graduate students. Some ideas that emerged from that frank and animated workshop will be incorporated in the City Clerk's Office 2016 work plan.
- The Chief Information Officer, the General Manager of Economic Development and Culture, IT World Canada and technology vendors co-sponsored Technicity; panelists and audience discussed the business impacts and municipal opportunities of the Internet of Things.

Next Steps

Moving forward, the Open Government Committee agreed that it must build on both the great ideas that emerged out of OpenSpaces, and the results of the two Open



Government Surveys (for Residents and for Staff).

The City of Toronto's Open Government Committee's 2016 workplan will include actions and priorities such as:

- Publish an Open Government Annual Report e.g. the report will draw on OpenSpaces and Open Government Survey feedback
- Implement Open Government Performance Measures
- Improve internal awareness and stronger commitment to Open Government and Open Data.

The City needs your partnership in transforming municipal government and services. We invite you to stay connected.

- Continue to challenge and engage us.
- Make us the focus of your research.
- Partner with us in game-changing ideas.

Get informed. Get inspired. Get involved with opening up your City of Toronto government.

Yours Truly,

Ulli Watkiss
City Clerk
City of Toronto

January 2016

Special Thanks to the Participating Organizations

- Institute on Governance
- Office of the Information Privacy Commissioner
- MaRS Discovery District
- MASS LBP
- The Mowat Centre
- Government of Ontario
- Open Data Institute
- Ryerson University
- Swerhun Facilitation
- University of Toronto
- City of Toronto
- Western University

