

February 25, 2016



Attn: Kitty von Bertele  
Open Government Partnership  
Steering Committee

Dear Steering Committee members,

Open Austin is a volunteer citizen brigade advocating for open government, open data, and civic application development. Our organization started in 2009 as a grassroots movement of volunteers upset about the City's procurement strategies for a new website. Our core complaint was that the City needed to collaborate with citizens to design and deliver its digital services. This debate played out at community events, city council hearings, in [the press](#), and online. As a result of these protests, the City of Austin managed the website redesign project in-house and built the site on an open-source content management system with local contract laborers, instead of outsourcing the project to a firm with no local ties. With the money saved from the project and with the support of our organization, the City invested in its open data portal, [data.austintexas.gov](http://data.austintexas.gov).

In the six years since, our relationship with the City has matured. Our efforts have led to the City's adoption of an "Open Government" directive and the creation of a "Civic Innovation Office." We also regularly survey Austin City Council candidates on their positions on open government and civic tech issues, and we co-host events and hackathons with City departments and staff. We have found allies and advocates for open data and civic tech across city departments. Many city employees attend our monthly events and have led our project teams. There are passionate individuals across many city departments and attitudes around open data have improved.

We recognize the constraints in technology adoption and community engagement in the public sector. We believe there are opportunities to improve despite these challenges and we hold our government partners to a high standard of accountability. The city's willingness to hear our concerns and partner with us makes clear its serious commitment to increasing accessibility and transparency. To further institutionalize open government policies that could make our city a leader on a state and national level, a collaborative approach between the City of Austin and civil society is required. For this reason, Open Austin supports the City of Austin's application to the Open Government Partnership Subnational Governmental Pilot Program.



Mateo Clarke

Chair & Brigade Captain, Open Austin