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## CIVIC INNOVATION AND OPEN DATA: A RECIPE FOR CHANGE

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**C**ities are under increasing pressure to keep pace with changing expectations. Today's citizens are tech-savvy consumers, accustomed to responsiveness, clarity and instant access to information. They are justifiably demanding that local government keeps pace with technological change and service quality expectations. But governments aren't always known for moving quickly. How, then, do cities rise to meet changing service demands and create new ways of connecting, informing and serving citizens?

The answer is: civic innovation that focuses on modernizing service delivery and retooling cities to meet citizens' evolving needs. Properly leveraged, open data plays a central role as a driver, enabler and as an outcome.

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## I. DATA-DRIVEN, OPEN INNOVATION

**Data as Enabler:** A Guelph student developed a waste-collection-day reminder app based on City open data. The City licensed his code and is currently expanding its functionality to be released as an official City app. This simple example illustrates how releasing open data can inspire citizen participation and engage innovators in problem identification and service design.

Creating new pathways for cities to solve complex problems, through open innovation, will be instrumental in helping them change. Guelph's Civic Solutions Accelerator ("the Accelerator") pilot project "hacks the RFP process" by sharing three complex municipal problems and challenging entrepreneurs, startups and SMEs to develop solutions while embedded within City departments (like an in-house R&D lab). The firms gain extraordinary access to target markets, municipal networks, a potential first client, and the data sets that enable innovators to understand the problem, design prototypes and for

proof-of-concept. On the City side, this allows departments to ensure that solutions are built – not bought – to solve complex municipal problems. It enables them to experiment with and prototype solutions before locking in to a significant capital investment. This brings the City closer to new kinds of innovative solutions required to address complicated challenges.

To gain a wider perspective, City of Guelph data will be augmented with other municipal, provincial or national data sets with the help of one of the Accelerator's partners, Canada's Open Data Exchange (ODX). Through ODX, the Accelerator will also tap into an innovation community outside of the City by drawing organizations from across the province and the country. Once the solution is completed, the City can choose to purchase the solution or not, and the incumbent is free to sell the solution anywhere else. Guelph's Civic Solutions Accelerator will also develop new data streams which will themselves become open data sets.

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## II. OUTCOMES: DATA AND BEYOND

Problem-driven or user-driven civic solutions inevitably create new data sources that help municipalities better understand what citizens want and how to efficiently deliver services. The downstream economic impacts include the development of new firms, new jobs for citizens, and new opportunities for civic innovation, technology adoption and engagement.

It's a virtuous circle - one that will help enable and support a city's ability to connect with, serve and inform citizens. By design, it also will help cities realize the increased transparency and improved accountability required by open government. But evolving the way cities interact with citizens often requires changing how they operate. And for that, cities need to empower staff to help devise, participate in, and contribute to designing solutions. This requires executive and departmental support and, ideally, internal champions who educate, connect teams to external sources of innovation, and oversee change management initiatives.

**Tapping into Innovation Sources:** To be effective, civic innovation needs a more robust array of innovation sources committed to creating and using open data for mutual benefit (i.e., civic, citizen and economic). Partnering helps organizations do this by tapping into more varied sources of data, and attracting more firms, entrepreneurs and subject-matter experts. The City of Guelph's partners include ODX, Innovation Guelph, the Guelph Chamber of Commerce, and the University of Guelph's Centre for Business and Student Enterprise (CBaSE).

Civic innovation and open government are good for citizens. What's less obvious, but equally important, are the positive impacts for city staff. Civic innovation initiatives deliver new tools, convenience, time savings, greater visibility, and more information to teams. They empower staff and departments by championing ideas from internal innovators. They set up scenarios where, as cities help citizens have great civic experiences, they help themselves.

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### III. BEYOND GUELPH

The hope for the Accelerator is that it will create innovative "open government" and "open data" solutions that simultaneously work for citizens, for industry and for cities themselves. And that's something worth sharing.

The pilot of Guelph's Civic Solutions Accelerator launches in June 2016, successful applicants embed in City departments September through November, and it wraps with a solution demo day in December 2016. Based on the success of the Pilot, Guelph will work to implement a full-time Civic Solutions Accelerator, and ODX will help roll out similar pilot programs to other interested municipalities in Canada. Learn more at [open.guelph.ca/accelerator](http://open.guelph.ca/accelerator).

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**KEVIN TUER** is the Managing Director of Canada's Open Data Exchange (ODX). His mandate is to help organizations realize the potential of open data from public and private sources. Kevin works with all levels of government, private firms, academia, entrepreneurs and enabling organizations to promote data standards, access, adoption and commercialization.



**ANDY BEST** is the Open Government Manager at the City of Guelph. His goal is to drive the modernization of City services and governance to give citizens a great civic experience. Andy works with internal teams, community partners and innovators to design and implement civic innovation solutions and open government projects, processes and tools.