



City of
OAKLAND
California

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News from: Office of the City Administrator

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City of Oakland Launches "Oakland Answers"

A collaborative online resource for citizens to find government information

Oakland, CA —Today, the City of Oakland officially launched "Oakland Answers" answers.oaklandnet.com at a brownbag lunch with City staff.

Oakland Answers is a citizen-focused website that is question-driven, with a simple, easy-to-navigate design. Website users can ask a question or type in keywords about the topic they want information on and receive concise, easy-to-understand responses, as though talking to a neighbor. People begin most Internet journeys with Search, so the site is designed with that in mind. The content is organized based on citizen understanding – the intuitive way people think of a problem -- not the way the City is organized internally.

Oakland Answers is based on "Honolulu Answers," an application built for the City of Honolulu by 2012 Code for America fellows. OpenOakland, our local Code for America brigade adapted the website to serve Oakland. This project serves as a great example of how open source technologies can be leveraged across cities to make government run more effectively and make city services and information more accessible to citizens.

Content for Oakland Answers was developed collaboratively during the National Day of Civic Hacking on June 1. That day, the City of Oakland co-hosted ReWrite Oakland with OpenOakland and Code for America. This civic engagement event was sponsored by the Kapor Center for Social Impact, HUB Oakland and PopUpHood.

Over 70 programmers, designers, city officials, writers and local residents attended ReWrite Oakland and volunteered their time to draft content for this new website during the all-day writeathon. Participants generated more than 220 questions, and by day's end, they had drafted answers to more than 80 percent of them; collectively they donated more than 350 hours of work to the City—that's equivalent to several months of staff time accomplished in a single day of service.

Since the event, City staff has spent time reviewing the answers for accuracy while preserving the community driven tone of the website. In just under two weeks, a new website for the City has been developed and launched. The initial content serves as a great starting point and, over time, the database of questions and answers will grow. The City of Oakland will host and maintain the website, but the collaborative nature of the website will carry on with ongoing opportunities for the community to help expand the content.

Oakland Answers is the latest in a series of recent efforts by the City to engage with citizens and provide increased access to information through the use of innovative technology:

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- In January the City launched an Open Data website, data.oaklandnet.com, which serves as the central repository of the City of Oakland's public data.
- Last fall the City launched a community engagement website called EngageOakland.com. The platform encourages community ideas, feedback and suggestions to help shape, grow and sustain the healthy future of Oakland. The site is sponsored by the City to help advance innovative ideas and improve service delivery.
- Last year, the City of Oakland's Public Works Agency launched SeeClickFix, an online and mobile tool that helps residents report, track and monitor non-emergency problems, such as graffiti, illegal dumping or potholes.
- The Oakland Police Department began using Nixle and Twitter to send out neighborhood-specific crime alerts.
- Citizens have long had the ability to track and monitor crime through websites such as crimemapping.com and oakland.crimespotting.org, as a result of efforts by the Oakland Police Department and the Department of Information Technology to open crime data to the public.
- The City has been working with OpenOakland—the Code for America Brigade—to launch "Adopt-A-Drain," a map-based, web app that allows for individuals, small businesses and community organizations to volunteer to clear the City's storm-drains.

Much of the inspiration for these new approaches has come through our collaboration with Code for America and OpenOakland, the local Code for America brigade. The City of Oakland is honored to be a 2013 Code for America city, one of 10 nationwide selected for its commitment to engaging a motivated community as well as its forward-thinking approach to openness and government transparency.

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