



City of
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News from: Office of the City Administrator

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City of Oakland and Code for America Launch "RecordTrac"

A new Open Government tool to explore, request and track public records online

Oakland, CA — Today, the City of Oakland officially launched "RecordTrac," a new web application to help the City manage and track incoming public record requests.

RecordTrac, <http://records.oaklandnet.com>, improves transparency, allows users to track progress of their request and saves staff resources through more efficient request handling. The tool provides a searchable public archive of the requests and the responses received from City staff so users can locate information that has already been retrieved. This saves users time and saves City staff from having to process a duplicate request.

The Public Records Request system was built by the City of Oakland's 2013 Code for America Fellows Sheila Dugan, Cris Cristina and Richa Agarwal. The fellows have been working with the City of Oakland since February to develop an application that will bolster the City's goals of increased transparency, more efficient processes and better access to public information.

"We are honored to be a 2013 Code for America city," said Oakland Mayor Jean Quan. "I'm proud that Oakland was one of 10 cities nationwide selected for this fellowship – Oakland truly stands out because of its commitment to engaging a motivated community as well as its forward-thinking approach to openness and government transparency. I want to thank everyone involved for helping us take this step forward in our goal to be a more transparent, accountable government."

"We knew the program would be a good fit in Oakland," said Councilwoman Libby Schaaf, who submitted the initial application for the Code for America fellowship. "Oakland was recently ranked among the top 15 U.S. cities for tech startups. With our tech-savvy local workforce, our grassroots creative community and our rich history of activism and civic service, Oakland was ready for this type of collaboration."

"Code for America has inspired a shift in the way that the City is building online services for the community," said City Administrator Deanna J. Santana. "In building this app, the fellows have applied methods gleaned from the technology sector. Working with lean processes, delivering the minimum viable product and iterating based on user experience and community feedback are all valuable ideas that are now being incorporated into the City's other business processes, effectively changing the culture within City Hall."

The development of this application and the City's partnership with Code for America has built a stronger culture of innovation within Oakland City Hall. As part of the development process, a working group was established with City staff from the City Administrator's Office, Public Ethics Commission, City Attorney's Office and City Clerk's Office. Besides looking at technology, the working group also reviewed the law, processes and policies around fulfilling Public Record Requests. In addition, the Public Ethics Commission is working with the community to outline a vision for transparency and Open Government in Oakland, furthering our shared goals of ensuring fairness, openness, honesty and integrity in City government.

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"Built into the web application is an inherently interactive, transparent model for communication between government employees and their communities," said Code for America Fellow Richa Agarwal. "Public Record Requests are one of the many ways in which governments interact with citizens, but capturing these interactions and shining a light on the process is really valuable. It's a huge accomplishment for us to have Oakland adopt this, but my hope is that this is a tool other cities will choose to adopt as well."

Oakland is not alone. Other cities are searching for better methods to respond to Public Record requests. As people become accustomed to finding information immediately online, government agencies throughout the United States are looking for tools that will allow them to increase efficiencies, while becoming more open and transparent.

Oakland's [Public Records Request system](#) was built in a way that it can easily be replicated elsewhere. With all of the [code posted on GitHub](#), the application can be quickly deployed by other cities and government agencies without much expense.

"This is an innovative solution that will make it easier for citizens to request information and data from their city government," said Mark Headd, Chief Data Officer for the City of Philadelphia. "This is yet another example of how Code for America is helping cities become more transparent and more innovative in collaboration with their citizens. We'll be watching Oakland's use of this new tool to see if we might be able to utilize it to respond to similar kinds of data requests here in Philadelphia."

Enacted in 1968, the California Public Records Act defines a "public record" as "any writing containing information relating to the conduct of the public's business prepared, owned, used or retained by any state or local agency regardless of physical form or characteristics."

"This new tool will be instrumental in our mission to ensure that all Oakland residents have easy and full access to information about our City's business and that we conduct the people's business in broad daylight," City Attorney Barbara Parker said.

Oakland's new Public Records Request system is the latest in a series of recent efforts by the City to engage citizens and provide increased access to information and more transparency:

- In June, the City of Oakland and Code for America launched *Oakland Answers*, answers.oaklandnet.com, a citizen-focused website that is question-driven, with a simple and easy-to-navigate design.
- The Public Ethics Commission held an [informational hearing](#) in June to explore current practices and emerging trends in open government.
- 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 the community engagement website EngageOakland.com. The platform encourages community ideas, feedback and discourse to help shape, grow and sustain the healthy future of Oakland.

The City of Oakland is grateful to the following foundations and companies for their generous contributions which have made the 2013 fellowship program possible: AkonadiFoundation, The William H. Donner Foundation, The Kapur Center for Social Impact, Accela and Pandora.