Case Study
Texas Department of Information Resources

DALLAS, TEXAS

Data-sharing activities across state agencies increased from
78% to 85%
over a four-year reporting cycle.

Internal data-sharing agreement credited with
saving about $90 million
in fraudulent unemployment insurance claims.

Open data portal saved the state an estimated
**$4.3 million**
in resources associated with employee time.

With more than 28.7 million residents in 254 counties, Texas Department of Information Resources is responsible for a broad — and growing — set of services. The department serves Texas government by leading the state's technology strategy, protecting state technology infrastructure, and offering innovative and cost-effective solutions for all levels of Texas government.

Texas Chief Data Officer Ed Kelly looked at digital technology not just to manage the data, but to improve how agencies collaborate with each other and with other jurisdictions, how resources are allocated, and how program outcomes are achieved. "Ultimately, data collaboration helps contribute to the overall success of the entire enterprise while creating greater transparency," Kelly said. "In government today, data is typically very siloed. Sharing data from one entity to another may help the receiving entity better achieve their mission, serve constituents more effectively, and provide opportunities for greater operational efficiencies."

CHALLENGE: TRUST THROUGH TRANSPARENCY

The state began building an open data program in 2014 with the launch of the open data portal. While the portal didn't have much fanfare when launched five years ago, today, it has logged more than 194,000 dataset downloads. The site features 562
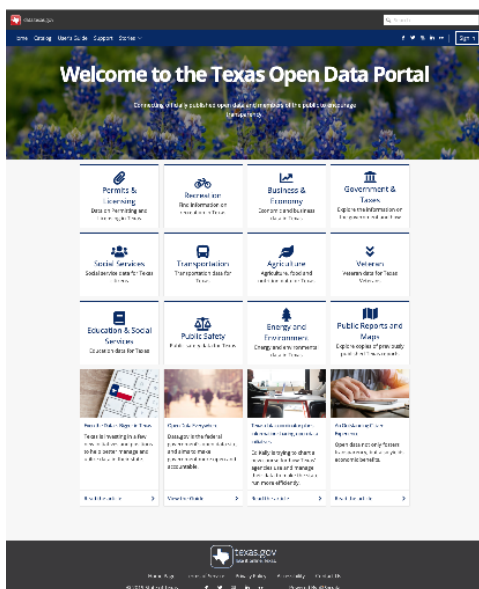
datasets from 10 agencies, as well as data federated from the cities of Austin and Dallas, Denton County Transportation Authority, and Austin's Capital Metropolitan Transportation Authority.

Having found success with the open data program, Kelly was eager to expand its scope by turning inward with a modern, cloud-based data solution.

Texas is a large, decentralized government. Each agency within the state works independently of one another, and many of these agencies are in the beginning phases of developing data governance and enterprise information management programs.

Given the size of the state government, the number of stakeholders, and its decentralized structure, the state faced an awareness issue with transparency among the public it serves. The state needed better insights to increase trust with both Texas leadership and the public. At the heart of the challenge is ensuring multiple layers of government transparency with data sharing across agencies and organizations.

SOLUTION: INTERNAL DATA-SHARING PROGRAM

Texas powers its internal data-sharing program with Tyler's Enterprise Data Platform, a Data & Insights application, which it uses to store, manage, share, and analyze state datasets.

By improving these processes, Texas is at the forefront of one of government's greatest data challenges: how to get more value from data.

"When we entered into our new contract with Tyler in 2018, they were rolling out [the Enterprise Data Platform]," Kelly said. "We look at it as a private cloud instance for data-sharing and have branded it internally as the closed data portal. This new environment provides a secure, easy-to-use, highly customizable, permissioned-based repository for our customers to share data. We have established the open data portal, now we are doing the same for the closed data portal."

The solution creates a self-sufficient capability across the department by supporting three data-sharing strategies:

1. Vertically, at the individual agency level

2. Horizontally, between agencies

3. Simultaneous vertically and horizontally, between and within agencies. A hybrid approach focused on a specific topic, such as veterans suicide prevention and other cross issues facing the state overall.

"We talk about the closed data portal and, in a way, it effectively says you can share data vertically within an agency," Kelly said. "A large agency looks at a project that

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involves multiple areas and needs as a way to bring in people as collaborators or reviewers to facilitate that communication."

The horizontal approach allows agencies to transfer information in a secure, scalable, and private mode, rather than a one-off manual process, Kelly said.

The variation is the hybrid closed data portal Kelly designed for specific topics that involve multiple agencies.

"We can set this up in a collaborative manner and give access to the appropriate level of people so we're controlling and managing the information flow and access," Kelly said, including non-state agency organizations or other stakeholders beyond the government sphere.

At the individual agency level, the Enterprise Data Platform enables teams and departments to gain better transparency, perform analytics, and identify new datasets that can be federated to the open data portal for public use.

Between agencies, the platform enables the sharing of data from one side to the other. Agencies can transfer data to a receiving agency, so that information can be shared within its vertical, or for analytical purposes to combine data.

At the third level, which involves collective sharing by multiple agencies, the state can share regulated or functional data in any direction. Data from multiple agencies is often necessary to respond to Texas' most pressing priorities.

With this modern, cloud-based data platform, state agencies and government leaders are able to identify and improve the performance of their programs, empower accountable officials with actionable insights, and engage the public with open data that's usable regardless of technical ability.

"My vision is to establish a data-sharing ecosystem, which is not just open data, but all types of data, involving agencies, cities, and counties, and to leverage our data portal and [the Enterprise Data Platform] — the closed data portal — as the centralized hub for data-sharing," Kelly said. "To accomplish that, we want to provide further education, more awareness, more hands-on training opportunities, and more outreach to the communities."

RESULTS: DATA PLATFORM EMPOWERS STAFF

To date, Kelly estimates the state has saved $4.3 million in employee opportunity costs through its open data portal, and internal data sharing is proving to have an even greater impact. Opportunity costs are savings realized by an organization by freeing up resources and time that would otherwise be used retrieving and disseminating data for tasks associated with public information requests.

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"In the area of data collaboration, the best example I have is between the Texas Department of Criminal Justice (TDCJ) and the Texas Workforce Commission (TWC)," Kelly said. "TDCJ shares incarceration data with TWC, which uses it to cross-match against unemployment information benefits claims."

Incarcerated inmates are not allowed to file claims or receive unemployment benefits while they are in jail.

This data-sharing agreement, involving a third-party vendor, along with other TWC analytical efforts, is credited with saving the state about $90 million in preventative unemployment insurance claims over four years.

The state Department of Agriculture has become a heavy Tyler user, including using data-storytelling on Data & Insights Perspectives to share details about food and nutrition programs for schools across Texas.

"What's happening is through this evangelistic approach we've been taking, or highlighting this topic in different areas at the legal front and the individual agency front, is that data-sharing efforts have increased," Kelly said.

In a biennial survey to executives in the IT leadership area, one question focuses on data-sharing. When the first survey was out, it reflected that sharing was about 78%, Kelly said.

"What we've seen over the past several surveys is that it's starting to increase," Kelly said. "We're up to about 85%, and we've seen a steady marked increase in agencies citing that they participate in data sharing with other agencies."

At the agency-level, Kelly has focused on starting off with a small proof of concept to drive success. He considers himself to serve as the evangelist for data and also as a partner on behalf of the agency to help them through the process.

"Once you get one win, you can pick up the next, and soon the success builds upon itself," Kelly said. "The biggest thing is this can transcend to other states. We need to be patient and persistent. Things take time to change in government, particularly around data-sharing. It's a cultural change management issue. It takes some time for people to be able to understand what that all means."

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