Policy and Practice in Data Governance and Sharing:

Engaging Toronto's Digital Infrastructure Strategic Framework (DISF) to Model Trusted Data Sharing

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Executive Summary

Sharing data across City of Toronto divisions can generate insights that support improvements to policy and service delivery. The complexity and range of municipal and provincial data infrastructure can create unintended obstacles to data sharing, hindering the capacity for identifying and implementing improvements.
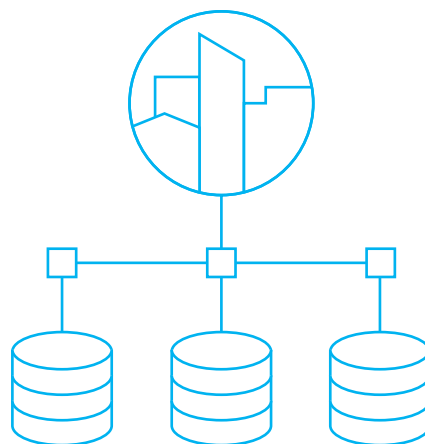
This report addresses the complex issues of City divisional data sharing by analyzing formal and informal process of data flow and blockages. Based on our findings, we make recommendations for a robust data governance framework to facilitate data sharing to improve programs and services while still abiding by provincial legislation that is focused on protecting individual privacy. Under the umbrella of the City's Digital Infrastructure Strategic Framework, this report examines a complex case study that exemplifies the data governance challenges found under the current system and data used to deliver income support programs and benefits by the Human Services Integration project. This case study has a specific focus on investigating data sharing processes and does not review associated business processes such as service delivery.

Drawing on expert interviews with City staff at the Human Services Integration (HSI) Project Office in Social Development, Finance and Administration, we have identified the data sharing pain points that arise from conflicting formal legislation that seeks to protect privacy and policy and practice that

intends to enable data sharing to improve services. Our data model highlights how data flows through multiple city divisions and between municipal and provincial agencies using different infrastructure, which may lead to data blockages and quality degradation.

The report offers several specific recommendations toward City trusted data sharing and governance. At a high level, we recommend that **data infrastructure** (defined as the physical and digital objects, mechanisms and structures through which data is captured, stored, and shared, e.g., databases) could be improved through **cross-divisional integration**; **data quality** (defined as the measure of the condition of data based on factors such as accuracy, completeness, consistency, reliability) could be improved by establishing an **information verification pathway**; and that **data governance** (defined as collection of process, policies, standards, and metrics to support lawful and effective use of data toward expressed goals and standards) could be improved through the adoption of a more **mature data sharing agreement**. More detailed findings and recommendations are presented in Figure 1.

These recommendations are framed by the Digital Infrastructure Strategic Framework's principles, particularly the principles of a Well-run City, Privacy and Security, and Digital Autonomy.

FIGURE 1

Summary of major findings and recommendations

	FINDING		RECOMMENDATION
Data Infrastructure	Lack of integration between municipal databases produces inefficiencies.	→	Allow cross-divisional access to relevant data to facilitate service delivery, while maintaining legislative standards of privacy and security.
Data Quality	Information verification across multiple sources and platforms is an ongoing challenge.	→	Create a process to enable the identification of the most accurate information across City systems.
	Existing data tools and platforms do not provide sufficient insights to effectively leverage data.	→	Allocate more divisional resources towards data tools, training and personnel.
Data Governance	Service Level Agreements, where present, do not adequately consider and support alignment in data governance across partners.	→	Establish clearly defined Service Level Agreements that outline roles and responsibilities, including those for data governance, and are reviewed on a regular basis.
	Without a Data Sharing Agreement between all city partners, data sharing is too often an ad hoc process.	→	Develop a data governance policy to effectively support trustworthy and secure data sharing.