Athens-Clarke County Data Strategy
FY26 - 28

March 3, 2025

The Unified Government of Athens-Clarke County (ACCGov) is proud to reaffirm our commitment to fostering a data-driven culture that strengthens our ability to serve the community. As we implement the Athens-Clarke County Data Strategy, we recognize that data and evidence are essential tools in making informed decisions, measuring our impact, and continuously improving the services we provide to residents.

Over the years, our government has made significant strides in leveraging data to enhance transparency, operational efficiency, and public engagement. From the establishment of our Data Governance Committee to the adoption of performance measures across departments, our commitment to utilizing high-quality data has been integral to shaping policies and delivering responsive services. However, we acknowledge that this is an ongoing journey—one that requires sustained collaboration, investment, and leadership.

The Manager's Office fully supports this strategy as a framework for embedding data-driven decision-making across all facets of our government. By ensuring that our policies and programs are grounded in reliable information, we can proactively address challenges, allocate resources more effectively, and build trust with the community. Moreover, our participation in initiatives such as the Bloomberg City Data Alliance reinforces our dedication to adopting best practices and fostering innovation in local government.

We encourage all departments, community partners, and residents to engage with this strategy and take an active role in shaping how data is collected, shared, and used to improve our collective future. Together, we can create a more transparent, inclusive, and effective government that meets the evolving needs of Athens-Clarke County.

Sincerely,

Brad Griffin
Interim Manager

Dear Fellow Data Enthusiast,

If you're reading this, you have at least a passing interest in Athens-Clarke County's long journey toward better harnessing the transformative power of good data. About seven years ago, we stood up a data governance committee and initiated a partnership with Bloomberg Philanthropies What Works Cities program. These two actions were the dual catalysts that have propelled our work in using information to problem solve, deliver better service, and measure how well we're doing as a government.

When we first began this work, we naively thought we would one day "finish". Now we know that the scope of this work is ongoing and iterative, and will likely outlive many of our municipal careers. We also realize now that we are not the change agents in this effort. It's a grassroots shift in how we look at the data all county employees and their community partners collect and use in their day-to-day work. All we can do is help our peers think about how we make decisions and design better mechanisms to collect, clean up and effectively use the best and most complete information available.

Welcome to our Countywide Data Strategy and Work Plan. You are now a part of the team that's striving daily to build a more connected, inclusive and effective Athens-Clarke County.

Respectfully,

Joseph D'Angelo, MPA, GISP
Director, Budget and Strategic Analysis and Chief Data Officer
Unified Government of Athens-Clarke County, Georgia

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction

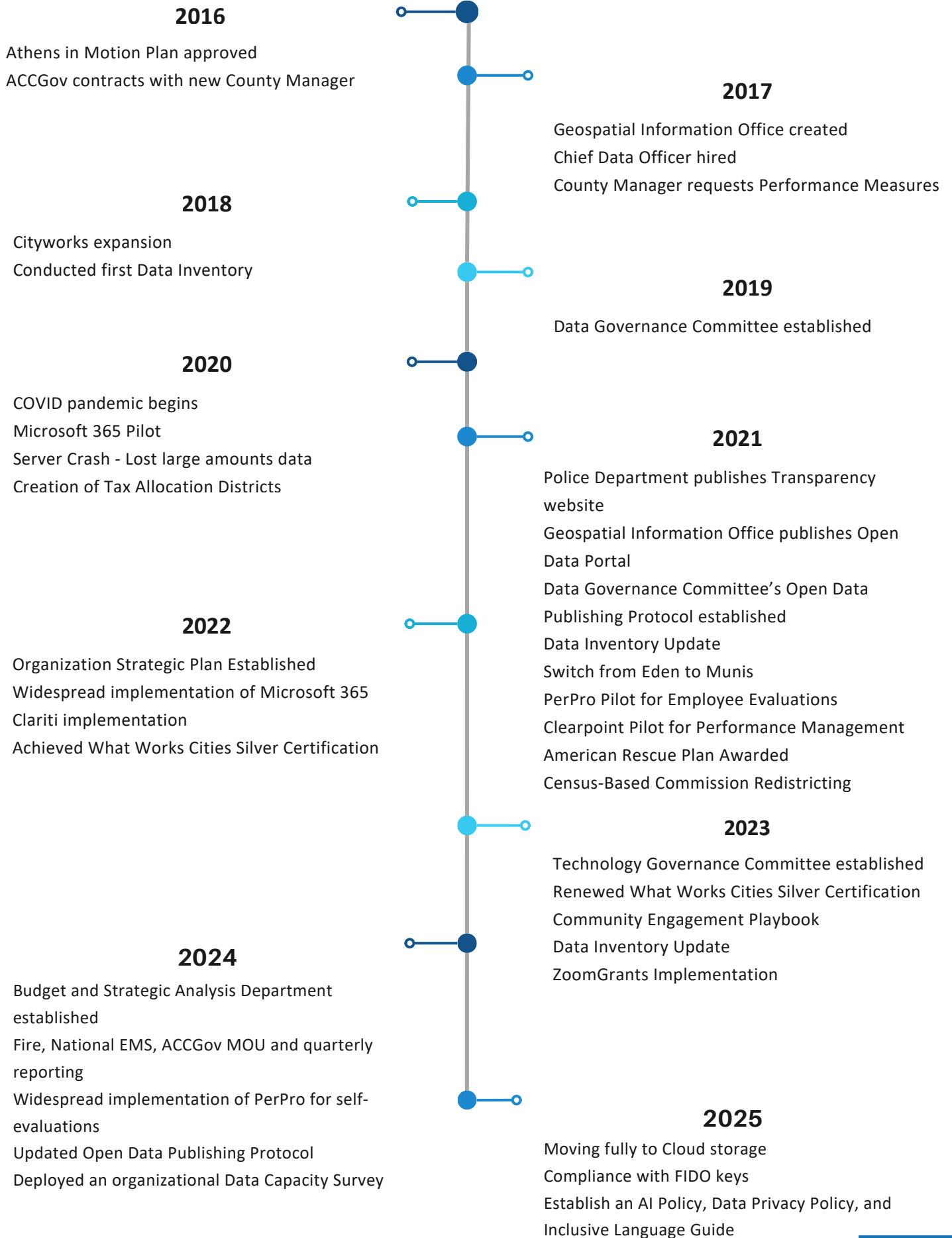Athens-Clarke County's mission was adopted on November 4, 1997 and reads:

> The mission of Athens-Clarke County is to provide an open and responsive government, facilitating a positive environment for individuals to obtain a high quality of life and local organizations to achieve success by providing innovative, quality services and responsible stewardship of the community's resources, to benefit current and future generations.

The mission perfectly illustrates why Athens-Clarke County (ACCGov) needs a cohesive plan in place to address areas of importance with data and analysis. As we continue to progress through the 21st century, ACCGov is shifting the way that decisions are being made. The Mayor and Commission are seeking more data to inform their policy-making decisions. The Manager's Office is asking for evidence and reasoning to support how and why departments are operating the way that they are. Our residents want to see and understand the data themselves so that they can voice their opinions and trust that their leaders are representing their best interests.

In the past, ACCGov has strived to meet the stated mission but that has not always been done using data to the maximum extent. There has been a tendency to rely on the skills of individuals instead of innovative data analysis. Data has been used to answer questions, rather than to tell a story and anticipate questions. Data has also been used to justify plans that were already in place rather than inform new decisions. To continue to operate as an open and responsive government, we endeavor to be more proactive and anticipate the needs and interests of our residents and leadership. The timeline on Page 5 shows steps that ACCGov has taken to become a more data-driven organization. It also includes a server crash that highlighted the need for organizational data management and governance standards.

This plan will establish a shared vision of how data can best be used across ACCGov. We will do this through policies, procedures, professional development opportunities, and adopting best practices. It is our responsibility to use our data to make decisions that benefit our residents.

ACCGov's Data Journey

2016
Athens in Motion Plan approved
ACCGov contracts with new County Manager

2017
Geospatial Information Office created
Chief Data Officer hired
County Manager requests Performance Measures

2018
Cityworks expansion
Conducted first Data Inventory

2019
Data Governance Committee established

2020
COVID pandemic begins
Microsoft 365 Pilot
Server Crash - Lost large amounts data
Creation of Tax Allocation Districts

2021
Police Department publishes Transparency website
Geospatial Information Office publishes Open Data Portal
Data Governance Committee's Open Data Publishing Protocol established
Data Inventory Update
Switch from Eden to Munis
PerPro Pilot for Employee Evaluations
Clearpoint Pilot for Performance Management
American Rescue Plan Awarded
Census-Based Commission Redistricting

2022
Organization Strategic Plan Established
Widespread implementation of Microsoft 365
Clariti implementation
Achieved What Works Cities Silver Certification

2023
Technology Governance Committee established
Renewed What Works Cities Silver Certification
Community Engagement Playbook
Data Inventory Update
ZoomGrants Implementation

2024
Budget and Strategic Analysis Department established
Fire, National EMS, ACCGov MOU and quarterly reporting
Widespread implementation of PerPro for self-evaluations
Updated Open Data Publishing Protocol
Deployed an organizational Data Capacity Survey

2025
Moving fully to Cloud storage
Compliance with FIDO keys
Establish an AI Policy, Data Privacy Policy, and Inclusive Language Guide

Core Values

We can turn our plan into action by aligning with our organization's Core Values. ACCGov's main Core Values have been adapted to incorporate data practices and are illustrated as follows:

Integrity

We uphold our responsibility to provide data that reflects the high standards of our organization.

- **Provide Transparent, Accurate Data:** Double-check all data for accuracy before sharing it with others.
- **Hold Ourselves Accountable:** Encourage honesty and openness within the team; if errors are found, work together to correct them quickly.

Competence

To maintain excellence in data quality, all ACCGov staff will develop their skills in data collection, organization, and retention.

- **Seek Training and Ask Questions:** Take part in data training sessions to stay updated on best practices. If unsure about data collection or handling, seek guidance from experienced colleagues or supervisors.
- **Follow Standards:** Consistently use ACCGov's guidelines and tools for data management to ensure high-quality information.

Collaboration

Through strategic communication and data-sharing efforts, we strengthen connections across ACCGov, facilitating resource alignment and enhancing collective efforts

- **Share Data Within and Across Departments:** Look for ways to connect with other departments by engaging teams.
- **Respect Diverse Ideas:** Encourage a culture where different viewpoints and expertise are valued in decision-making.

Community

By openly sharing data insights and actively gathering feedback, we identify community needs, improve service quality, and ensure that our initiatives resonate with and benefit all residents.
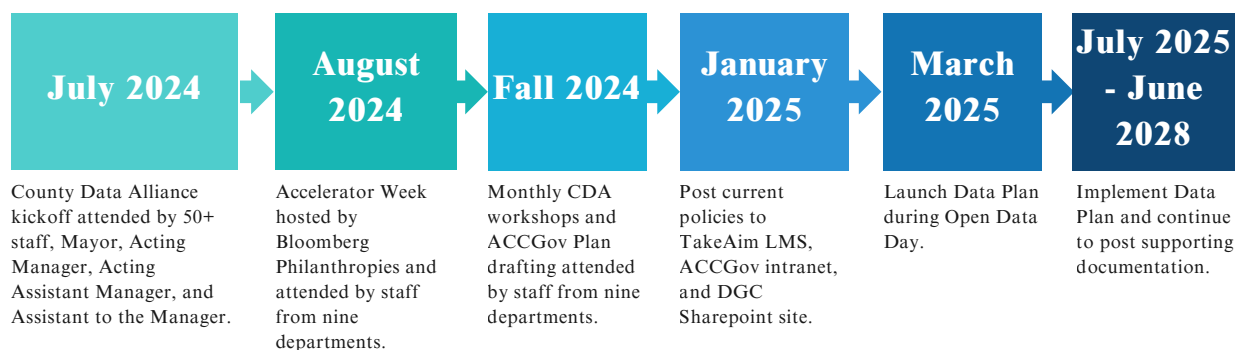
- **Listen to Feedback:** Pay attention to feedback from the community and use it to improve how data is collected, shared, or used.
- **Make Data Understandable:** Present data in a way that is clear and accessible to the public, so they understand the information and its impact.

Each Other

Expanding awareness of available data, tools, and resources bridges gaps between departments, reduces service redundancy, and unites similar efforts for a more strategic use of data and resources on behalf of the community.

- **Foster Cross-Departmental Communication:** When starting new projects, check for similar efforts in other departments to avoid duplication and support shared goals.
- **Encourage Team Support:** Recognize and support each other's strengths, and encourage a positive, unified environment that values teamwork.

Process

July 2024	August 2024	Fall 2024	January 2025	March 2025	July 2025 - June 2028
County Data Alliance kickoff attended by 50+ staff, Mayor, Acting Manager, Acting Assistant Manager, and Assistant to the Manager.	Accelerator Week hosted by Bloomberg Philanthropies and attended by staff from nine departments.	Monthly CDA workshops and ACCGov Plan drafting attended by staff from nine departments.	Post current policies to TakeAim LMS, ACCGov intranet, and DGC Sharepoint site.	Launch Data Plan during Open Data Day.	Implement Data Plan and continue to post supporting documentation.

We have written this Data Strategy as part of the County Data Alliance, making plans for the initiatives that we will create and implement in the next 3 years. A general timeline of these events can be found above. As stated, we are posting Data Governance policies onto TakeAim in the Policies section so that there are multiple access points (TakeAim Learning Management System, ACCGov intranet, and SharePoint site). We publicly launched during Open Data Day on March 21, 2025; an opportunity for ACCGov staff, UGA community members, and other nonprofit and community partners to discuss the state of data in Athens-Clarke County. The Mayor and Commission will have a chance to review the strategy during the May Work Session. In addition to the access points mentioned above, the plan and the resulting policies and procedures will be sent to all members of the organization through an email to our World email list. Providing a link to the plan from this department's web page is optional.

Measuring Impact

We will use ClearPoint to track our progress on this strategy, as we do with all of our Strategic Plans. This will also help integrate at least one initiative into ACCGov's FY26-28 Strategic Plan. ClearPoint has reporting capabilities that will allow us to generate monthly and quarterly progress reports. Some of the actions that this plan outlines have clear established start and end points, which we will be able to indicate by marking these actions as complete. Other actions that do not have a clear end point or are continuous activities, we can assign performance metrics that are expected to improve over time. ClearPoint will serve as our tool for tracking progress, and the resulting materials - such as policies, procedures, and training materials - will be made available through appropriate platforms. These include, but are not limited to, TakeAim Learning Management System (LMS), ACCGov's intranet, ACCGov Data Governance Committee's SharePoint site, or ACCGov's Open Data Portal. To access the publicly available information, please go to accgov.com/opendata.

Practices in Place

Over the last ten years, the organization has made great strides to become more data-centric and evidence based. We have begun integrating these practices in order to facilitate better communication and collaboration. The Data Governance Committee and Technology Governance Committee were tasked with creating policy and protocols along with approving software and hardware to ensure fluid data exchange and accessibility to data across the organization.

INITIATIVE (CHRONOLOGICAL)	RESPONSIBILITY	CORE VALUE	PILLAR OF DATA
Cybersecurity Protocols	Information Technology Department	Integrity	Governance
Chief Data Officer	Director of Budget & Strategic Analysis	Competence	Capacity
Data Governance Committee	Open Data Specialist and Committee Members	Integrity	Governance
Data Inventory	Open Data Specialist and Data Governance Committee	Collaboration	Quality
Open Data Publishing Procedure	Open Data Specialist and Data Governance Committee	Community	Transparency
Open Data Portal	Open Data Specialist	Community	Transparency
Community Engagement Playbook	Communications Department	Community	Use
Technology Governance Committee	Information Technology Director and Committee Members	Integrity	Governance
Deployed an Organizational Data Capacity Survey	Budget & Strategic Analysis Department and County Data Alliance Team	Competence	Capacity
Data Privacy Policy	Data Governance Committee	Community	Governance

The Five Key Pillars of Data

Governance

Information is a commodity and one of Athens-Clarke County's most valuable and often-used assets. We must take steps to ensure the security and sustainability of our data. The Data Governance Committee will investigate and implement best practices for determining data ownership, accountability for upkeep, and the most sensible legal practices regarding data distribution. Ensuring accuracy, impartiality, and accountability in data management will allow this government to be well-positioned to build trust with our colleagues and residents while paving the road for evidence-based decision making.

ACTIONS	START YEAR	STATUS
Implement a **Standard Data Sharing Agreement** when working with partners outside of the organization.	2024	In Progress
Implement a **Data Sharing Policy** that guides the organization on when to establish agreements to loan and receive data from partners.	2025	Not Started
Write a **Data Sharing Handbook** that gives further guidance on when and how to share data.	2027	Not Started
Familiarize organization with ACCGov Data Governance, Open Data Portal, Data Quality Tool, and Data Inventory as a tool.	2025	In Progress

How Governance Actions align with ACCGov Mission Statement:
1. **An open and responsive government:** Governance practices ensure transparency, accountability, and impartially in data management, which helps the government remain open and responsive to residents' needs.
2. **Responsible stewardship of community resources:** Managing data securely and sustainably reflects the commitment to responsible stewardship, ensuring data is treated as a valuable resource now and for future generations.

<u>Quality</u>

According to DAMA International, data quality is the degree to which data meets the expectations of accuracy, completeness, consistency, integrity, uniqueness, and validity by its users. Common challenges affecting data quality include: inconsistency, inaccuracy, incompleteness, duplication, outdated data, irrelevance of data, and disaggregation. ACCGov plans to address these aspects of data quality to allow for improvement of data analysis for residents. By increasing data quality and standardizing data practices, we can make data analysis more efficient and enable longitudinal analysis. These standards will allow for equitable collection of resident feedback to inform service delivery.

ACTIONS	START YEAR	STATUS
Create a **How to Make a Public Input Form Guide** that walks through creating a public input form on the approved platforms.	2024	In Progress
Write a **Data Collection Best Practices Sheet** for data collected through surveys, fieldwork, and other methods using ESRI products.	2025	In Progress
Integrate Data Quality into Data Inventory by having each contact complete the **Data Quality Evaluation Tool** for at least one dataset.	2025	In Progress
Write a protocol for **Data Quality evaluation** outside of the Data Inventory cycle.	2026	Not Started
Create a Data Standards Guide for fields that are common across datasets.	2025	In Progress
Establish a **Data Archive Process** for datasets that are no longer maintained in the existing format.	2025	Not Started

How Quality Actions align with ACCGov Mission Statement:
1. **Provide an open and responsive government:** Ensuring accurate, complete, and consistent data supports transparent communication and informed decision-making, allowing the government to be more responsive to residents' needs.
2. **By providing innovative, quality services:** High data quality enables efficient and reliable data analysis, which leads to the development of innovative and high-quality services that address community needs effectively.
3. **Responsible stewardship of the community's resources:** Standardizing data practices and improving data quality reflect a commitment to responsibly managing data as a community resource, ensuring it is accurate and useful for current and future decision-making.

Capacity

Data capacity refers to the people, skills, and culture that it takes to support efforts related to quality enhancement, creating governance structures, analyzing and communicating with data. Rather than looking at job titles, capacity refers to the various roles and responsibilities that are needed to undertake the work, and how to set teams up for success in achieving their data goals. ACCGov continually commits to encouraging staff to receive relevant training to develop the skills necessary for accurate data collection, organization, and retention. Simultaneously encourage training and the strategic use of data and resources by maximizing existing skill sets with collaborative endeavors across departments and with nonprofit partners.

ACTIONS	START YEAR	STATUS
Deploy an **organization-wide data capacity survey** to identify strengths and gaps in capacity.	2024	Completed, will conduct another later in the program.
Develop a **Data Workforce Recruitment Tool** keeping job descriptions current to new technologies to recruit and retain employees with data skills.	2027	Not Started
Create multiple modes of **data upskilling for ACCGov employees** including small group sessions, lunch and learns, and creation of content on TakeAim.	2026	Not Started
Provide **Senior Leadership with options for Data Training** to help our leaders make data-driven decisions.	2027	Not Started
Offer enhanced **Community Data Training,** including during events such as Open Data Day. Develop targeted training for community organizations and nonprofit partners.	2025	Open Data Day occurred on March 21, 2025. Other events will be planned
Create a **description of the responsibilities of the Budget and Strategic Analysis Department**, as well as the services that the department offers staff and residents.	2025	Not Started

How Capacity Actions align with ACCGov Mission Statement:
1. **Provide an open and responsive government:** Building staff capacity through training, collaboration, and skill development ensures that employees can respond effectively to data needs, fostering a more open and responsive government.
2. **Facilitating a positive environment for individuals to obtain a high quality of life:** When staff are well-trained and set up for success, they can use data to improve services, directly contributing to residents' quality of life.

<u>Use</u>

Data use is a broad term that refers to any data manipulation for a particular purpose. In this specific context, we refer to instances where data is used to inform decisions. Recognizing our greatest resource is the competence of our coworkers, we can create a standard expectation that recommendations are accompanied by a synopsis of the work performed to develop raw data into better-informed decisions. By setting expectations for the integration of performance metrics, standard operating procedures, and continual training, data analysis will be more fluid and recommendations will have a consistent basis. This improved data analysis for our residents will create a more positive environment and high quality of life while also allowing for experimentation and pilot program for innovative future activities.

ACTIONS	START YEAR	STATUS
Develop an all inclusive **Policy and Process for Selecting Performance Metrics**, which could be a guide on how to do this and key checkpoints for data quality and applicability.	2026	Not Started
Create **Performance Management Framework with Strategic Planning**, creating consistency of both qualitative and quantitative data inputs from data contributors and their budget as applicable.	2025	In Progress
Policy and Process for the creation and maintaining of Standard Operating Procedures for departmental operations and position specific operation.	2026	Not Started
Develop a process/system for Purchasing's **integration of vendor performance evaluations.**	2026	Not Started
Set an expectation that analysis will be used to justify the **repurposing of funds to new or successful initiatives** when requesting budget changes.	2026	Not Started
Facilitate frequent training and providing technical support for data software that is used regularly.	2027	Not Started

How Use Actions align with ACCGov Mission Statement:
1. **By providing innovative, quality services:** Integrating performance metrics, standard operating procedures, and continuous training ensures data-driven innovation and high-quality services that adapt to community needs.
2. **Responsible stewardship of the community's resources:** Making decisions based on thorough data analysis ensures efficient use of resources and reduces waste, demonstrating responsible stewardship for current and future trends.

Transparency

ACCGov collects and maintains a large quantity of data, but only a small portion of that is readily available on the Open Data Portal. In general, a lack of coordination, collaboration, and consistency in how we engage and communicate with the community harms the quality of data and creates barriers to access. Through our commitment to being an open and responsive government, we must establish the practice that evidence and reasoning accompany recommendations and decisions being made throughout the organization. By taking a collaborative approach to telling stories with data about daily operations, we will be able to maintain the trust of our residents.

ACTIONS	START YEAR	STATUS
Develop a **Guide to Creating Metadata.**	2025	Not Started
Require Metadata for all data on the Open Data Portal.	2026	Not Started
Provide information **for Navigating the Open Data Portal**	2025	In Progress
Create guides for capability of **Open Data on different platforms.**	2025	Not Started
Publish a **Public Facing Data Inventory.**	2025	Not Started
Spotlight an ACCGov Initiative monthly.	2025	Not Started
Inform residents about available datasets through the use of **Data Storytelling**.	2026	Not Started

How Transparency Actions align with ACCGov Mission Statement:
1. **Provide an open and responsive government:** Making data accessible and ensuring that decisions are accompanied by clear evidence and reasoning fosters transparency and reinforces ACCGov's commitment to being open and responsive.
2. **Facilitating a positive environment for individuals to obtain a high quality of life:** Providing clear, accessible data helps residents understand government operations and decisions, allowing them to engage more meaningfully and benefit from improved services.
3. **By providing innovative, quality services:** Transparent data practices improve the quality of services by ensuring decisions are based on accurate, shared information, leading to better outcomes and trust in government actions.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thank you to those who contributed to the writing and planning of ACCGov's Data Strategy.