CITY OF SÃO PAULO: AGENTS OF OPEN GOVERNMENT

Brazil's largest city is embarking on a massive experiment to have citizens educate its public employees.

COLLABORATION

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BASIC INFORMATION

Owner

Open Government Committee of the City of São Paulo City

Project Contact

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Project Summary

Open government training provided by citizen teachers

Sector

Open Government

Audience

Government employees, elected community representatives, social activists and the general population

Problem that it is trying to solve

Government doesn't possess all the knowledge it needs to solve public problems.

Platform

Courses are done in person. Sign up can be done online on the City's website or in person.

Design basics

Citizen trainers commit to offering the course 10 hours per month for six months for 40 people per class. The city provides physical spaces and a stipend for teachers. Training is offered in four subject areas.

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KEY TAKEAWAYS

What's new?

Before creating the Agents of Open Government program, São Paulo's city workers received training at City's School of Public Administration or through local universities.

Incentives for participation

To encourage public employees' participation, city workers who attend the courses gain credits in the municipal evaluation system that allow them to get pay raises. The City also offers certificates to the citizens if they comply with the required attendance.

Challenges

The largest challenge has been coordination, as there are many different departments involved and 64 locations. The program needs to articulate many variables, such as spaces, equipment, teachers and public.

Anticipated impact/Metrics

Civil servants are trained in open government topics that help them govern more effectively. Metrics include the number of workshops and participants and the projects created by the courses, such as websites or apps.

Why is this project interesting?

The program is based on the premise that learning can happen outside of formal civil-service training colleges, and that citizens have many things they can teach civil servants that could be useful to their work.

The scale of the program, that aims to reach 25,000 people in a year through in person workshops and classes, is a logistical challenge and an unprecedented effort in open government training.

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An open government is one that is transparent, participatory, and collaborative. But moving from traditional government operating behind closed doors to more open institutions, where civil servants work together with citizens to create policies and solve problems, demands new skills and sensibilities.

As more and more public-sector leaders embrace the concept of openness as a positive force for governmental effectiveness, they would do well to look toward Brazil's largest city, which has launched an effort to ask the public to train São Paulo's 150,000 civil servants. It's described as the world's largest open-government training program.

The program, known as Agents of Open Government – part of a wider city initiative called São Paulo Aberta[1] (Open São Paulo) – aims to teach through peer-to-peer learning, where government employees learn *from citizens*. Twenty-four citizen-led courses that began in November 2015 are aimed not only at government employees and elected community representatives but also at social activists and the general population.

São Paulo is betting on the radical notion that learning can happen outside of formal civil-service training colleges. This initiative reflects a growing global trend toward recognizing that institutions can become smarter[2] – more effective and efficient – by making use of the skills and experience of those outside of government.

Officials hope to have 25,000 participants over the course of the coming year. To encourage public employees' participation, city workers who attend the courses gain credits in the municipal evaluation system that allow them to get pay raises.

AN OPEN CALL FOR CITIZEN TEACHERS

Any of São Paulo's 11 million residents were eligible to apply to be an "open government agent" to provide training in any of four subject areas: Open and collaborative technology; transparency and open data; networked communication; and mapping and collaborative management.

The only requirement is that a would-be trainer commit to offering the course 10 hours per month for six months for 40 people per class. Since only half of Brazil's population has Internet access, the training is done in person. The city offered the spaces for training (such as libraries, schools and cultural centers) and trainers receive a stipend of 1,000 Brazilian Reals a month (about $270 USD).

1   http://saopauloaberta.prefeitura.sp.gov.br/
2   http://smarterstate.org/

São Paulo's call to citizens to become open government training agents: Do you communicate through networks? Do you promote participation? Do you understand open data? Do you master open software?[3]

For the initial courses, São Paulo 's Open Government Committee received 200 applications and selected 48 of them to be trainers. They come from a variety of backgrounds: 42 percent are women and 40 percent are minorities. The journalist and writer Martha Lopes is teaching a course titled "Gender and Power – Rebuilding Communication in Networks." Wellington Da Silva, a technologist and MBA, is teaching "Introduction to Programming Logic Applied to Open Government." And the video producer Osvaldo Santana is teaching "Multimedia Creation and Dissemination." Other courses encompass subjects from "cultural cartography" to marketing through social networks to hacker activism.

Participants of the "Gender and Power–Rebuilding Communication in Networks" course.

3   http://saopauloaberta.prefeitura.sp.gov.br/index.php/tudosobretudo/

The Agents of Open Government program is intended to accelerate the acquisition of 21st century skills for governing. According to Gustavo Vidigal, Deputy Secretary of International and Federative Affairs and Laila Bellix, Program Coordinator at São Paulo City Hall, the program addresses demand for open government within public agencies that cannot be met with traditional training.[4]

Although they did offer some training to would-be teachers, organizers explain that, at least in the program's first phase, they have not wanted government to define the formats and specific subjects but wanted to tap into what citizens were already doing in the city. It remains to be seen whether in future iterations the city will do more to curate particular subjects and how it might go beyond the "open call" approach to enlisting trainers to target those with specific know-how.

The first 24 courses started on November 6th and the remaining 24 will begin mid 2016.

Initially, quantitative evaluation for the program will include the number of workshops and classes, and attendees. After three months of the program, the city has carried out 97 activities with 2767 participants, which represents 71% of all the expected enrollment. The audience for the courses has mostly been elected community representatives, civil servants and beneficiaries of social programs. Qualitative evaluation will involve talking to agents and to participants. Additionally, each course has specific results or products they are working on, such as apps, platforms or campaigns. At a minimum, the organizers' goal is that more civil servants are exposed to the topics of open government, which could in itself contribute to their

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4   The GovLab interviewed the organizers during the Open Government Partnership Global Summit in Mexico City on October 29.

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effectiveness in governing. What also remains to be seen is whether and how these citizen courses ultimately change how São Paulo governs, makes policies and solves problems, and whether participants are better able to serve the public.

ABOUT THE GOVLAB

The GovLab's mission is to improve people's lives by changing how we govern. Our goal is to strengthen the ability of institutions – including but not limited to governments – and people to work more openly, collaboratively, effectively and legitimately to make better decisions and solve public problems. For more information, please visit: *www.thegovlab.org*.

ABOUT SMARTER STATE

New tools—what GovLab calls technologies of expertise— are making it possible to match the supply of citizen expertise to the demand for it in government. Smarter State is a GovLab initiative to design and test how public decision-making could improve if institutions knew how to use the technologies of expertise to tap the wisdom of citizens' and civil servants.