



Open Data Policy

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1.0 Purpose

Buncombe County seeks to advance transparency and accountability through open data. To that end, the Open Data policy will govern the provisioning of information to the Open Data Explorer saving the County time and money by increasing access to non-sensitive data often procured through public records requests while promoting increased civic engagement.

2.0 Applicability

This policy applies to:

- 2.1 Any County department, office, administrative unit, commission, board, advisory committee or other division of Buncombe County government.
- 2.2 The County’s Open Data Explorer (<https://data.buncombecounty.org>).
 - 2.2.1 The policy does not govern any other sites that the county manages or otherwise makes use of the domain suffix of “.buncombecounty.org”.

3.0 Policy

3.1 Open Data Explorer

The County commits to develop and implement practices that will allow it to:

- 3.1.1 Release County data that is public record, making it freely available in appropriately varied and useful open formats, using an open license with no restrictions on use or reuse, and fully accessible to the broadest range of users to use for varying purposes;
- 3.1.2 Publish high quality, updated data with documentation (where available) and permanence to encourage maximum use;
- 3.1.3 Minimize limitations on the disclosure of public information while appropriately safeguarding protected and sensitive information; and,
- 3.1.4 Encourage innovative uses of the County’s publishable data by agencies, the public, and other partners.

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3.2 Online Location for Published Data

- 3.2.1 The County will maintain a publicly available location on the County's website, or in another suitable online location, where the County's published data will be available for download.
- 3.2.2 Published datasets shall be placed into the public domain.
- 3.2.3 The County will specify a recommended data citation available for viewing on the Open Data Explorer for published County data to encourage responsible use of County data.

3.3 Governance

Implementation of the Open Data Explorer will be overseen by the Information Technology Director or their designees, who will work with the County's departments and agencies to:

- 3.3.1 Oversee the creation of a comprehensive inventory of datasets held by each County agency which is published to the central open data location and is regularly updated;
- 3.3.2 Develop and implement a documented process for determining the relative level of risk with potentially sensitive, non-protected information so as to make a determination about whether and how to publish it;
- 3.3.3 Develop and implement a transparent process for prioritizing the release of datasets which takes into account new and existing signals of interest from the public (such as the frequency of public records requests), existing opportunities for data use in the public interest; and,
- 3.3.4 Ensure that published datasets are available for bulk download and available via public application programming interfaces (APIs) without legal encumbrance.

3.4 Open Data Report and Review

- 3.4.1 Within one year of the effective date of this policy, and, thereafter, no later than June 30th of each year, the Information Technology Director or their designee shall publish an annual Open Data Report. The report shall include an assessment of progress towards achievement of the goals of the County's Open Data Program.
- 3.4.2 During the review and reporting period, the Information Technology Director, or their designee, should identify plans for improving the County's open data management processes in order to ensure that the County continues to move towards the achievement of the policy's goals.

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4.0 Policy Non-Compliance

Employees willfully violating the terms and conditions of this policy may be subject to appropriate disciplinary action, up to and including dismissal.

5.0 Audit

All policies for Buncombe County may be subject to audit or review as outlined in the [Internal Auditor's Statement](#).

6.0 Definitions

- 6.1 **Data** – Statistical, factual, quantitative, or qualitative information that is maintained or created by a County agency.
- 6.2 **Open Data** – Data that is available online, in an open format, with no legal encumbrances on use or reuse, and is available for all to access and download in full without fees or a requirement of registration. “Legal encumbrance” includes federal copyright protections and other, non-statutory legal limitations on how or under what conditions a dataset may be used.
- 6.3 **Open Format** – Any widely accepted, non-proprietary, platform-independent, machine-readable data format, which permits automated processing of such data and facilitates analysis and search capabilities.
- 6.4 **Dataset** – A named collection of related records, with the collection containing data organized or formatted in a specific or prescribed way, in tabular form.
- 6.5 **Protected information** – Any dataset or portion thereof to which an agency may deny access pursuant to North Carolina General Statutes regarding public records or any other law, rule or regulation.
- 6.6 **Sensitive information** – Any data which, if published by the County online, could raise privacy, confidentiality or security concerns or have the potential to jeopardize public health, safety or welfare to an extent that is greater than the potential public benefit of publishing that data.
- 6.7 **Publishable data** – Data that is not protected or sensitive and that has been prepared for release to the public.
- 6.8 **Public domain** – Refers to a dataset, the use of which has no restrictions or requirements.
- 6.9 **County agency** – Any County department, office, administrative unit, commission, board, advisory committee, or other division of County government.

7.0 Background

In 2019, Buncombe County formed a Transparency Ecosystem Workgroup. This group leads the County's efforts toward its goal of advancing transparency and accountability through open data. The Open Data Explorer is one vehicle for this work and is managed according to the Open Data Policy and Procedures. Information is only added to the Open Data Explorer by request from or approval by impacted Departments, and only once it's been vetted for any potentially sensitive or protected status.

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