

Putting Data to Work for The City of Charlotte



Charlotte, North Carolina, is the country's 16th largest city and home to nearly 900,000 residents. It consistently ranks as one of the top growing cities and includes more than 10 Fortune 1000 companies. The City's focus areas include Great Neighborhoods, Safe Communities, Mobility, Economic Development, and the Environment.

Robert Cerrato, Data Program Manager of Shared Data Services for the City of Charlotte and his team are long-standing users of Tableau Software, leveraging the platform to build and share rich data visualizations throughout its internal network. As the City continued to grow, the desire was to grow Tableau's applicability to the external public.

"When it comes to data, we are trying to create that single source of truth both for our internal agencies but also with our community. In doing so we can drive new insights and informed decision making for all", stated Cerrato.

Since 2013, the City of Charlotte had a very robust open data presence pushing the data public facing through an open data portal allowing them also to create mapping apps and map products to the public. However, pushing this information publicly did not offer a mechanism of security and control. This was a time-consuming task as data needed to be manually extracted and monitored for each publication. With only one Tableau core license the City was operating on one production server, one development server and one test server. Due to fiscal constraints, purchasing an additional core license for the external environment was not a realistic option.

The City of Charlotte enlisted the help of Cherry Bekaert Digital Advisory to help responsibly and successfully shift their internal Tableau environment to an external public facing environment, a more economical alternative solution.

The vision was to create an environment that kept the City of Charlotte's internal contact intact with its fellow agencies while giving them an automatic mechanism to push their content for anonymous access to the public. In doing so, the City is able to control and govern the sharing of Tableau visualizations which significantly lessened their dependency on Tableau Public.

Cerrato points out "the ability to safely and responsibly connect and mutually share valuable data internally and with the public enables a deeper connection between the inter-departments of the City and its residents opening a window for deeper insights, knowledge sharing and unlocking new opportunities."

Expanding the Power of Tableau and Data for The City of Charlotte

Building the external environment has allowed Cerrato's team and the greater agencies within the City to ideate on future Tableau projects and opportunities such as the public transportation system, Charlotte Area Transit (CATS). CATS, operates bus and rail transit services in Mecklenburg County and surrounding areas to over 320,000 riders on a weekly basis. Multiple vending machines are located throughout the City enabling riders to purchase tickets. Maintenance personnel are responsible for servicing the machines and keeping them operable, however, given the age of the servers and applications supporting the system, the machines were becoming increasingly unreliable. Seeing the power and application of Tableau, CATS and the Shared Data Services team partnered together with Cherry Bekaert to leverage Tableau as the new application face for the people who service the ticket vending machines. This enabled maintenance personnel to see in real-time the location and status of machine operability allowing for quick maintenance turn around and a significant decrease in machine downtime and lost revenue.

We now have the ability to govern what what's going out there facing the public. And so, we spend less time policing up the people who are sharing these data in these visualizations and more time collaborating with other City agencies, creating opportunity and shared value. Tableau and the team of Cherry Bekaert Digital Advisory have enabled this which continues to be a win-win for the City and our greater community."

- Robert Cerrato

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