

Waldo Jaquith

Colin Wood | March 23, 2016



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Open data is popular today because people sense the potential it holds, but the problem is that there's a lot more talk than action. For many of the advances open data has seen, however, the world can thank Waldo Jaquith.

Jaquith helped the White House establish its open data policies as a member of the Open Data Working Group. As director of U.S. Open Data, Jaquith spends his days helping governments wrap their heads around a complex and exciting trend, and his nights finding new data sets to open and imagining new tools to launch.

He created The State Decoded, a software platform that makes state codes, court decisions and legislative tracking service data understandable to regular people. That project spawned America Decoded, which became the OpenGov Foundation's central mission.

He helped develop software called Data SEAL that helped prove open legislative data isn't a legal impossibility. He also helped develop software that makes it easier to use a data repository platform for government called CKAN. Jaquith has unlocked data sets that could save government hundreds of millions in unpaid fees and operational costs.

Jaquith is a senior technology adviser to the Sunlight Foundation. He's passionate, he's generous with his time and he'll talk about open data with anyone. He says if the funding for open data ever dries up, he'll probably keep doing it anyway. When his workday is done, Jaquith says he goes home and opens more data.

"I actually think open data is fun," Jaquith said. "I really enjoy it and I know that's strange, but I'm privileged to be able to practice open data professionally. That I'm paid to do something I was doing for fun for years is just magical. ... It all still feels a bit like a fantasy to be able to do this for a living."

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