

New city data portal highlights inequality, opportunities

By MIRANDA NEUBAUER 5:01 p.m. | Oct. 28, 2015

The de Blasio administration and charitable groups suggested Wednesday that a powerful new city data portal could be instrumental in highlighting inequality across the city and in guiding policy.

The [Data2Go.NYC](#) platform, launched Wednesday, brings together for the first time a wide range of federal, state and local data on the city in an easily accessible format. It maps hundreds of types of data — on demographics, education, health, voting, public safety and more — by community board district and census tract and compares them to those in other neighborhoods and the city average.

The portal — developed by Measure of America, a nonprofit initiative of the Social Science Research Council, and funded by the Leona M. and Harry B. Helmsley Charitable Trust — also offers visualization dashboards and a tool to let users to examine possible correlations between indicators, share specific map views on social media and download raw data.

The data will be updated every year for at least the next five years with the Helmsley trust's grant. Humantific, which helped design the portal's logo, is sponsoring a [visualization challenge](#) using the portal's data, with \$3,500 in prizes.

At a launch event Wednesday at Civic Hall in Manhattan, CEO John Ettinger said the Helmsley trust had wanted to take a data-driven approach to building the "flexible, nuanced platform" it felt foundations, charitable organizations, policy makers and academics needed.

"In the early days of developing our [New York City regional grants program], we expected to find and rely heavily on rich databases, other data sources and information about the region's needs, all of which would be compatible and well-organized," he said. "Obviously, we found that this simply did not exist."

Measure of America co-director Sarah Burd-Sharps highlighted the "huge, huge task" her data analysis team faced, spending "endless hours and months working with these data,

cajoling agencies to release it, promising to respect confidentiality, then getting it, extracting it, calculating with it, cleaning it, geocoding it, checking it, rechecking it."

To illustrate the portal's potential, she showed how using the new portal's correlations tool, a user can see a strong correlation between the consumption of sugary drinks and life expectancy.

That trend was visible in Brownsville, which has the lowest life expectancy of any New York City neighborhood.

"A baby born today in Battery Park City/Tribeca can expect on average to outlive a baby born in Brownsville by more than 11 years," she said.

That, she said, was why her nonprofit had developed the portal — "to point out this disparity."

Matthew Klein, the executive director of the Center for Economic Opportunity and the senior advisor for service innovation in the Mayor's Office of Operations, highlighted a tool that measures the equitable delivery of core city services across the city.

"One of our challenges is to think about where can we bake the notion of equity into everything that the government does — not just into anti-poverty programs, but thinking about how to allocate capital dollars or other core infrastructure," he said.

Cynthia Lamy, metrics manager for the anti-poverty group the Robin Hood Foundation, suggested the same could be true for charitable foundations, noting that the portal could help them measure the real impacts of their grant money.

Klein said the platform fit in with Mayor Bill de Blasio's vision of data-driven government and offers policy makers a chance to recognize areas that need attention because more members of the public will be able to point them out.

"I work in city government, and we have trouble getting data from different agencies," he said. "Having [data] in a place that allows such easy access is something that I think is going to be a tool for city workers who own the data to be able to look and see in a snapshot some of the places that they want to dig more deeply."