



# CASE STUDY

## **Agents of Open Government** – São Paulo, Brazil

### **SUMMARY**

Agents of Open Government – part of a wider city initiative entitled “São Paulo Aberta” (Open São Paulo) – aims to provide a platform for peer-to-peer learning, where private citizens with useful skills are given support to develop courses for government employees, civil society groups and communities in all corners of São Paulo. This initiative reflects a growing global trend toward recognising that institutions can become smarter – more effective and efficient – by making use of the skills and experience of those outside of government.

## THE PROBLEM

São Paulo has a wealth of knowledge and skills that could and should be incorporated by government and shared more broadly throughout the city. However, until now the city has had no systematic approach to sharing knowledge. Furthermore, courses on many issues, such as open source software, social media communications and mapping technologies, were rarely available outside the city centre or only at a prohibitive cost, rendering them inaccessible for many people.

## AN INNOVATIVE SOLUTION

The Agents of Open Government programme created by the city of São Paulo addresses these issues by identifying citizens that have skills they are willing to teach. Utilising the city's range of infrastructure, they are able to bring courses to the communities where they can be accessed at no cost. The participation of public employees as students in these courses has the additional effect of inverting government. Instead of being told what to do by the city, citizens are given an opportunity to design courses that can bring new skills and understanding to public employees, resulting in improved and better services offered by the city.

The programme began with an open call for applications, which was disseminated and promoted through existing civil society networks, social media and via presentations at local community events. Any resident of the city with the desire and requisite skills to teach a particular subject was welcome to apply, with the understanding that they would be required to offer their course for 10 hours per month for 6 months, in exchange for a monthly stipend of BRL 1 000 (approximately EUR 270). The initial call received 200 applications. Twenty-four agents were chosen for the initial cycle and 24 in the second cycle in 2016. Courses are grouped into the follow categories: open and collaborative technology, transparency and open data, networked communication, and mapping and collaborative management. Over 2016, 1 200 different workshops were held.

The programme was made possible by a number of partnerships with key institutions. The Municipal School of Public Administration, which is the main provider and coordinator of training for public employees at the local

level, agreed to provide credits to municipal employees who take courses from the agents. These credits can accumulate towards eventual promotions. In addition, the school works in collaboration with a number of agents to develop courses directed specifically at municipal employees, and promotes these courses through the school's network.

Another important partnership has been developed with the Municipal Department of Social Assistance and Development, which provides a range of social protection services for São Paulo's most disadvantaged citizens. This partnership has brought the work of agents to both the beneficiaries of the department's services, as well as the employees and educators who deliver them. For example, the OECD attended a course for educators on the use of digital animation techniques that can be incorporated into programmes with disadvantaged youth. In both cases, these partnerships provide opportunities to align the programme with city priorities and mainstream employee development needs.

## NOVELTY

São Paulo is one of a few cities to be active in the Open Government Partnership (OGP). São Paulo Aberta (Open São Paulo) includes a range of initiatives related to transparency, accountability, civic participation and innovation, which have the ultimate goal of developing democracy in the city and changing the organisational culture of government. It became apparent to the open government team that traditional approaches to learning and development, both for citizens and public employees, did not meet the demands of these new challenges. Instead, they conceived a common platform that could meet these goals, while bringing citizens and public employees together to build and define a new relationship.

## IMPACT AND RESULTS

The workshops and courses taught by the agents have been well attended and well evaluated by participants. From November 2015 through to the end of 2016, over 15 000 people attended courses and workshops made available through the programme. Over 90% of participants rated their experience as good or great with regard to information availability, quality of the agent's



Agents of Open Government course.

knowledge and teaching skills, and applicability of the subject. Agents meet together on a monthly basis to review evaluations and conduct peer reviews of each other's work, with a view to constantly improving their courses and their teaching skills.

Interviews and discussions with agents revealed many learning-related stories concerning the identification of problems and possible solutions. For example, one agent worked with educators on issues related to adolescent women. Together, they started a blog to share stories, thereby improving their collective understanding of the challenges young women face in these communities. Others discussed ideas for creating simple apps that could benefit their community. The mapping workshop showed public employees how to take advantage of a range of free and open source software to map community services, making significant savings on the use of proprietary versions.

### REPLICABILITY

The issues that this programme addresses are not confined to São Paulo or Brazil, but exist in all large urban areas. Such areas are also home to citizens and civil society organisations that are able and willing to share their knowledge and skills for the collective improvement of the urban environment. This approach therefore has a high replicability quotient, as there is little need for

complex infrastructure or a high level of investment. What is required is space across the city in the form of schools, community centres and other environments that can be used as training centres. Some courses will require access to Internet connections and computers. The programme also relies on a network of active citizens and members of civil society, and a strong relationship between these actors and the city. Finally, a committed core team is needed to coordinate the programme.

### CHALLENGES AND LESSONS LEARNED

Feedback from participants greatly improved between the first and second cycles of the programme, which shows that officials are making efforts to iteratively enhance the programme. This is the result of regular meetings with all agents and the use of peer reviews and other processes to refine teaching skills and improve workshops. Many agents discussed the importance of building connections with local community leaders, obtaining their input for the design of courses, and using these networks to build awareness and increase attendance. These elements not only enable the programme to provide opportunities for sharing knowledge, but also present an opportunity to reinforce bonds between the city and civil society. Other agents spoke of the importance of open and transparent calls for workshops, and the need to invest in a good communications campaign to encourage people with useful project ideas to apply.