

OSTROM WORKSHOP RESEARCH SERIES

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Averting Tragedy of the Community
Resource Directory Commons: How Open
Referral is Developing Data Standards and
Information Infrastructure for Health,
Human, and Social Services



Wednesday, March 11, 2020

12:00–1:00 PM • Ostrom Workshop, 513 N. Park

Community resource directory data' comprises information about the accessibility of health, human, and social services that are available to people in need. Such services are provided by a fractured landscape of governments, non-profit organizations, contractors, and other civic institutions. Institutions that fund services don't tend to collect information about the accessibility of those services — and service providers often lack strong incentives to promote this information themselves. Instead, directory data tends to be aggregated by 'infomediaries,' for use in their proprietary channels, or for sale to third parties as a commodity. The result is a knowledge anti-commons, in which resource data is simultaneously overproduced and underutilized — a tragedy that causes systemic dysfunction across the so-called 'safety net.' This paper outlines a set of strategic interventions pursued through the Open Referral Initiative — a community of practice that has developed data exchange standards, open source tools, and pilot projects through which multiple stakeholders experiment with new methods of sharing resource information as open data. The paper's final section outlines a set of institutional designs that can hypothetically sustain the provision of trustworthy open resource data as a public good.

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Greg Bloom is the founder of the Open Referral Initiative. Previously, Greg managed communications for Bread for the City in DC. He is a cooperative developer with more than fifteen years of experience in community organizing. He has been a fellow with Provisions Library and Civic Hall Labs, and has published in *In These Times*, *Civic Quarterly*, *Personal Democracy Forum*, and Code for America's *Beyond Transparency*.

Presentations are open to the public (see our website for papers). You are welcome to bring your lunch. For questions, contact Allison Sturgeon (sturgeon@iu.edu; 812/855-3151).