

Data Crowdsourcing Strategies

What do you do when you can't get access to the data? Design a crowdsourcing strategy so the data comes to you.

Websites like Yelp, TripAdvisor, and urbanforestmap.org all show that crowdsourcing volunteer user information can work to shape and grow a marketplace. With sufficient momentum, a USDN member collaboration thinks Rent Rocket will have a similar impact in the sustainable rental housing market. The www.RentRocket.org project focuses on developing a green rental housing tool that will: 1.) Help renters consider sustainability factors - like utility costs, energy efficiency and access to transit and recycling facilities - alongside other factors - like rent, number of baths, and access to laundry facilities - when making housing decisions, and 2.) Help landlords grasp the value of sustainability investments as a marketable asset and share their sustainability achievements for increased occupancy.

In the first phase of a USDN Innovation Fund grant, project partners were confronted with the complexities of getting access to data from their utilities and municipal organizations. They needed this data to populate a rental housing website to inform occupants of the true cost of living in a particular unit. While the team works to develop the RentRocket website, they are exploring crowdsourcing methods to develop their own datasets.

Steps for Crowdsourcing Sustainable Housing Data Strategies:

- Identify cooperative landlords and work with them to obtain detailed rental unit data.
- Create incentive campaigns to encourage students to share their rental energy data. The groups piloted \$50 giveaways campaigns in four cities. The first round of incentives was for people who voluntarily uploaded 13 months of data. They found very few people willing to do this for the \$50 giveaway. So, they stopped asking for granular data and started asking for average monthly usage/costs data. This produced better results.
- Identify existing data repositories, such as county assessors, and explore ways to import data in bulk.
- Work with classes and student groups to identify effective marketing strategies to encourage crowdsourcing. A finding from the early stage of this effort is that segmenting the student renter population - such as older students and existing environmentalists - helped get the ball rolling. The aim is to get a respectable percentage of data on rental units, in order to drive curiosity in the tool. The hope is that this will positively reinforce existing participants while bringing in additional participants.
- Discuss crowdsourcing strategies with contacts at urbanforestmap.org and other civically minded crowdsourcing sites.
- Create basic crowdsourcing resources, like uploading forms and info sheets.

Insight from the Project Halfway Mark: The project leader Jacqui Bauer sums it up with her sentiment, “Wow, this is as hard as we thought it would be, which makes it even more necessary.”