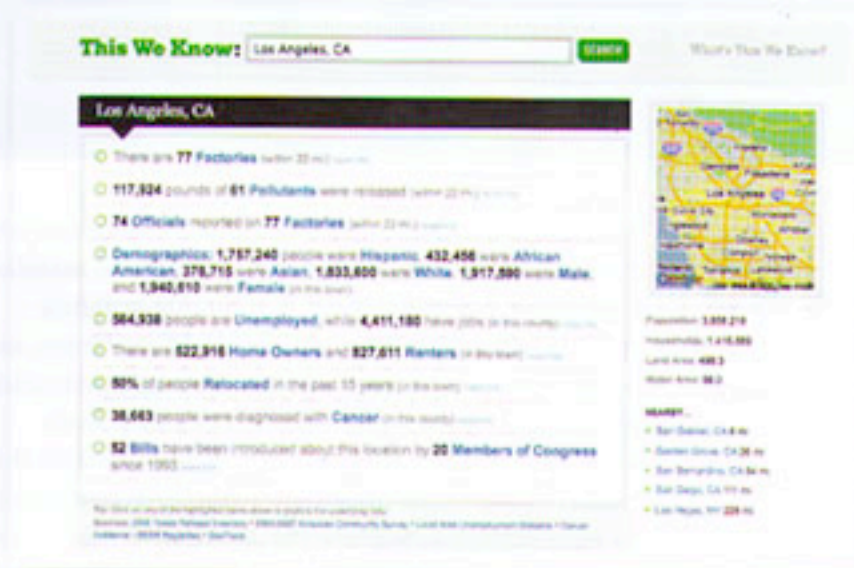
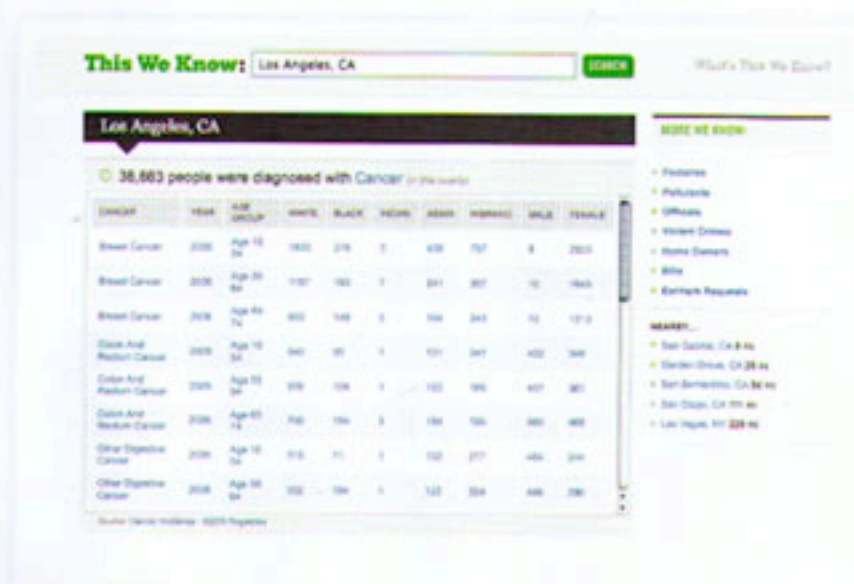


This We Know

Green River, Sway Design,
Intellidimension
www.thiswknow.org



This We Know distills publicly available government information into easy-to-read, city-specific data pages.

LAST YEAR, to celebrate the May launch of Data.gov, a site that releases government data to the general public, the government-transparency nonprofit Sunlight Foundation sponsored its second Apps for America contest, challenging developers to create useful tools around this suddenly available trove of information. Already, the Brattleboro, Vermont-based data-visualization company Green River and the New York-based interactive-design studio Sway, which had often collaborated on client work, had been discussing a data-transparency project. "The contest motivated us to really get started," says Green River's managing director, Michael Knapp.

Working with Intellidimension, a web-database company, they created the website This We Know. Modeled in part on the hyperlocal news feed EveryBlock, it lets users filter data sets from six agencies in the Data.gov catalog by location. The team developed a "factoid" approach to presenting the data, distilling information about demographics, cancer rates, pollution, earmarks, and more into simple, declarative sentences—"54% of people relocated in the last 15 years" in Berkeley, California; "There are 37 factories" within eight miles of Brooklyn, New York. "We wanted to take the data in all its complexity and present it in a natural language format," says Ellis Neder, creative director at Sway. Each factoid contains links to more detailed information, including the data's origins, providing a rich, intuitive resource for everyone from journalists and urban planners to people just looking to move to another town.

The team wants to take This We Know, which was a runner-up in the Sunlight contest, much further. Plans include resolving inconsistencies between data sets, integrating new ones, creating visualization methods to present data neighborhood by neighborhood, and developing mobile apps. "It's one of those projects where the work is really endless," Knapp says. To help fund their efforts, they're applying for next year's Knight News Challenge, but however far they get, Knapp thinks the very existence of This We Know and projects like it is a reason for optimism about the relationship between citizens and their government. "One of the lasting legacies of the Obama administration will be the increased transparency of information that the government has in its possession," he says. "Once good applications are written in front of these data, the government can not turn that off." —JESSE ASHLOCK