Increasing Accessibility and Transparency through Open Government Data Visualization: The Natural Gas Industry’s Campaign Contributions in Pennsylvania.

Open data initiatives within federal, state, and local government have created an unprecedented volume of publicly available government data through online open data platforms. While these efforts have increased the availability of government data, the role of effectively interpreting and diffusing information to the public is often filled by non-governmental actors. Open government data allows for independent data-driven projects to promote transparency and civic engagement by creating new platforms for communication between government and citizens.

The goal of this project is to utilize a visualization tool to translate publically available campaign contribution data into an easily-accessible, visually appealing, and interactive format. While campaign contribution data is filed and available to the public through the Pennsylvania Department of State, it is not easily synthesized by the public. A wealth of information exists but observation of campaign finance patterns from the raw data prove difficult. By focusing on political contributions from those with a financial interest in extraction of natural gas from the Marcellus Shale, it allows for the observation of the flow of money from those with pro-fracking interests into the political system.