

Nonprofit aims to broaden reach of campaign data

April 14 2009, By ANICK JESDANUN , AP Technology Writer

(AP) -- A nonprofit group that specializes in databases tracking the influence of money in politics is making its information available to others.

The group, the Center for Responsive Politics, hopes that individuals and other organizations will be able to develop new ways of slicing and dicing the data, such as by matching contributors to locations on an online map.

"Some of these we haven't thought of doing, and some of these we would have no interest in doing or aren't part of our mandate," said Sheila Krumholz, executive director of the center, which launched its OpenData initiative this week.

There are plenty of sources for basic data on campaign contributions. The center goes further by classifying donations by industry, making it easy, for instance, to tell how much members of the House Energy and Commerce Committee received from employees of [oil companies](#). The center also has data on lobbyists and advocacy groups as well as the financial disclosure statements that congressional members must make on their stock ownership and investments.

Generally the center has posted summaries of this kind of information on its OpenSecrets.org Web site, for free. It also performs customized searches, sometimes for a fee.

Now such information would be distributed more broadly under OpenData. Krumholz said the organization has historically guarded what it considered "the crown jewels" of its data, but that became increasingly difficult to justify in a digital age that makes sharing information easier and expected.

By making the underlying data widely available, all for free, the organization is hoping people will get more use out of the information.

The data - about 200 million records - will be restricted to noncommercial uses and must credit the center.

The center expects to lose some revenue from customized searches, but that will be partly offset by a three-year, \$1.2 million grant from Sunlight Foundation, which supports greater openness in government.

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