



WHAT IS AN OCD-ID?

[Open Civic Data Identifiers](#) (OCD-IDs) are semi-hierarchical, human and machine-readable unique identifiers for political geographies. OCD-IDs help eliminate problems caused by agencies, organizations, or systems using slightly different colloquial names to refer to the same geography (e.g. North Carolina's 9th Congressional District, NC-9, NC09, etc.). OCD-IDs can be used for political geographies as large as countries or as small as precinct splits, and everything in between.

WHAT ARE OCD-IDS USED FOR?

Anything that requires reference to a geographic name! OCD-IDs are a crucial piece of infrastructure for ballot, representative, and polling place lookup tools. They provide the link between the districts that contain a user's inputted address and the candidates, elected officials, or polling stations they are associated with. OCD-IDs also allow these datasets to be joined to campaign finance information, legislative vote history, or any other associated information without necessitating a painful entity resolution process. Though the primary use case for OCD-IDs is political, they can also be used for any other government service with a geographic component, such as police precincts or special zoning areas.

WHO USES OCD-IDS?

Currently OCD-IDs are used by companies like Google and Facebook, and by extension the millions of users who build on top of those tools. OCD-IDs are also included in the Voting Information Project 5 specification for use by state elections officials in pushing out official polling place information. In addition to the US, OCD-IDs are available for and used in dozens of countries around the world.

WHAT ADVANTAGES DO OCD-IDS HAVE OVER OTHER IDENTIFIERS?

While OCD-IDs can be used in conjunction with any identifiers currently in use, they do have a number of advantages:

- *Ubiquity and adoption.* OCD-IDs have been used to power tools that have connected people to their voting and elected official information hundreds of millions of times since 2014. Using OCD-IDs means your information is able to be immediately compatible with these existing systems.

- *Human readability & predictability.* Because OCD-IDs are based off of text-based tokens for the districts they describe, OCD-IDs are easier to understand at a glance and more intuitive to generate than numeric IDs. This makes it easy to automate creation and matching. Since they are consistently structured for all sizes of geography, it makes it easy for developers to build tools that scale without the need to collect and maintain hundreds of different unique ID schemes across states, counties, or other jurisdictions.
- *Stability.* Since OCD-IDs are simply references to boundaries, rather than boundaries themselves, tools using OCD-ID-enabled geographic data will always be pointing to the latest and correct version of districts. Changes to the boundaries made at the official level will be automatically updated in OCD-ID using tools.

HOW CAN GOVERNMENT GEOGRAPHERS AND ELECTIONS OFFICIALS GET INVOLVED WITH THE OCD-ID PROJECT?

The OCD-ID community welcomes contributions from government officials! Though it is an open source project, the community knows that information published by these offices is the most authoritative source possible, and have codified their importance in the [project's governance model](#). For those technically inclined, you can check out the [current ID repository](#) to see what IDs already exist that you can include in published shapes or information. If you find some IDs to be missing or in need of changes, submit a pull request or file an issue and a community member will be in contact. If you have any questions at all, or if you're curious to learn more, you can also contact data@techandcivicliflife.org.

