

Intergovernmental Solutions Newsletter

Transparency and Open Government

Spring 2009

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Transparency in Government

By Darlene Meskell
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Newly elected President Barack Obama has taken bold steps to inaugurate an era of government openness and transparency. In one of his first official acts, the President issued a **Memorandum on Transparency and Open Government**, affirming his commitment to achieving an “unprecedented level of openness in government.” Making known his belief that transparency is a fundamental responsibility of a democratic government, he called for the creation of an Open Government Directive that would require agencies to reveal their inner workings and make their data public.

A commitment to government accountability is at the heart of this message. By allowing citizens to “see through” its workings and investigate whether or not their leaders and organizations have met their expectations, the government brings the public into its inner circles and empowers citizens to contribute to decision-making. As citizens gain knowledge and understanding, their trust in government begins to grow.

Providing government data to citizens in a meaningful way will require a culture change, away from one where data are stored away for internal purposes to one that looks broadly at how data can be made accessible for re-use by the public. The federal website **Recovery.gov Reveals Details of the Stimulus Spending** on the \$787 billion American Recovery and Reinvestment Act. It will put the data out in useable form so that people can slice, dice and mash it up to gain meaningful information about how government is working.

These data feeds create opportunities to look at government programs in new ways that could never have been imagined by the data collectors. The District of Columbia's *Apps for Democracy* Contest drew upon the public's imagination to make D.C. data more useful to constituents. Under the leadership of then-CTO Vivek Kundra, the District sponsored a contest seeking creative applications that use D.C. government data. The results were astonishing. The 47 entries submitted to *Apps for Democracy* within only 30 days “produced more savings for the D.C. government than any other initiative,” according to Kundra, who has since been named federal CIO.

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The Intergovernmental Solutions Newsletter is produced twice a year by the Intergovernmental Solutions Division, GSA Office of Citizens Services and Communications; Lisa Nelson, Editor. Send comments and suggestions to: lisa.nelson@gsa.gov.

Transparency and Culture Change lays out a framework for changes that will enhance access to public documents. Current methodology for measuring eGovernment progress is nearing the end of its usefulness. **Measuring E-Government 2.0** presents a new benchmarking approach for measuring e-government's return on investment. The Association of Government Accountants establishes a baseline for understanding public attitudes with regard to transparency and accountability in **AGA Opens the Doors of Government to Citizens**.

Shedding Light on Corruption

Increasing transparency and citizen participation goes a long way toward undermining the problem of corruption. Transparency in the oil, gas and mining industry has been gaining traction over the last decade. **Fighting Corruption while Building Energy Security** looks at the paradox of resource-rich countries that are impoverished because of corruption and conflict. In India, land records are vital documents for both farmers and the government. They are used to prove ownership and are required for numerous administrative functions. **India: Revolutionary Land Records** reveals the incredible impact computerization of land records has had on the livelihood of small farmers.

Openness and transparency are necessary for effective government oversight and accountability. The idea that transparency does not guarantee accountability is explored in **Through a Glass, Darkly: What do we mean by transparency in government?** The need for government to tap into the expertise of others and withstand public scrutiny is discussed in **Transparency in Government Begins Outside**. As U.S. Supreme Court Justice Louis Brandeis so aptly put it "sunlight is the best disinfectant."

Collaborative Government

The issues of culture and policy need to be addressed before major progress can be made toward a truly collaborative government.

Transparency in Government speaks to these challenges and the need to engage citizens to solve today's complex problems. **Get Ready for Wiki-Government** looks at the millennial generation's use of social networks. This generation will change the shape of America's governing processes to one where some decisions will be made by crowds.

Government in ancient Athens was conducted in the public square. People met there to debate civic issues and drive policy decisions. **Building the Digital Public Square** describes how the District of Columbia is re-creating the public square to bring people closer to their

government using collaborative technologies.

Even today, **Open Government Serves Citizens**, as Maryantonett Flumian, the founding head of Service Canada illustrates, offering numerous examples of transparent government from the public and private sectors in the U.S. and around the world. Following her lead, this newsletter offers more of the many stories of how cooperation and innovative technology are being used to confront the huge changes required to create an open and participative government. The range of subjects is just the tip of the iceberg, and shows how better communications—on all levels—must be a key priority for government in the future.

President Obama's January 21 open government memorandum calls for transparency, participation and collaboration in government. These three concepts have been underlying American democracy since the start, but never have they been so central to a presidential vision. With advanced technologies and creative use of the Internet, a commitment to open government will go a long way toward giving the public control of the levers of power, and encouraging widespread participation in the civic life of the nation. ■

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Memorandum for the Heads of Executive Departments and Agencies

SUBJECT: Transparency and Open Government

My Administration is committed to creating an unprecedented level of openness in Government. We will work together to ensure the public trust and establish a system of transparency, public participation, and collaboration. Openness will strengthen our democracy and promote efficiency and effectiveness in Government.

Government should be transparent. Transparency promotes accountability and provides information for citizens about what their Government is doing. Information maintained by the Federal Government is a national asset. My Administration will take appropriate action, consistent with

Information maintained by the Federal Government is a national asset.

law and policy, to disclose information rapidly in forms that the public can readily find and use. Executive departments and agencies should harness new technologies to put information about their operations and decisions online and readily available to the public. Executive departments and agencies should also solicit public feedback to identify information of greatest use to the public.

Government should be participatory. Public engagement enhances the Government's effectiveness and improves the quality of its decisions. Knowledge is widely dispersed in

society, and public officials benefit from having access to that dispersed knowledge. Executive departments and agencies should offer Americans increased opportunities to participate in policymaking and to provide their Government with the benefits of their collective expertise and information. Executive departments and agencies should also solicit public input on how we can increase and improve opportunities for public participation in Government.

Government should be collaborative. Collaboration actively engages Americans in the work of their Government. Executive departments and agencies should use innovative tools, methods, and systems to

cooperate among themselves, across all levels of Government, and with nonprofit organizations, businesses, and individuals in the private sector. Executive departments and agencies should solicit public feedback to assess and improve their level of collaboration and to identify new opportunities for cooperation.

I direct the Chief Technology Officer, in coordination with the Director of the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) and the Administrator of General Services, to coordinate the development by appropriate executive departments and agencies, within 120 days, of recommendations



for an Open Government Directive, to be issued by the Director of OMB, that instructs executive departments and agencies to take specific actions implementing the principles set forth in this memorandum. The independent agencies should comply with the Open Government Directive.

This memorandum is not intended to, and does not, create any right or benefit, substantive or procedural, enforceable at law or in equity by a party against the United States, its departments, agencies, or entities, its officers, employees, or agents, or any other person.

This memorandum shall be published in the Federal Register. ■

BARACK OBAMA

Recovery.gov Reveals Details of the Stimulus Spending

By John R. Murphy
Deputy Program Manager
Recovery.gov

States were also expected to create their own Recovery Act pages providing data and information from, and links to, every participating state agency, locality and municipality in the state. The states' certifications and their recovery pages are linked to a state section of Recovery.gov. This map shows Recovery.gov's links to state sites at the beginning of April 2009.



Recovery.gov is the government website created by the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (Recovery Act) to track \$787 billion in federal funds Congress appropriated to stimulate the economy. It is introduced on the home page:

The Recovery Act "provides for unprecedented levels of transparency and accountability so that you will be able to know how, when, and where your tax dollars are being spent. ... This website, Recovery.gov, will be the main vehicle to provide each and every citizen with the ability to monitor the progress of the recovery."

All federal agencies will post information to Recovery.gov about the sources, recipients and use of expenditures under the Recovery Act, to make it easy for citizens to follow and understand the impact of the stimulus legislation. Live data feeds to the site will provide raw data that can be re-used in graphic presentations or in combination with other data to

generate information about the flow of the stimulus funds.

The website will allow users to track where the money is going, search by state or Congressional district, look up names of Federal contractors or other recipients of Federal dollars, and send in comments, thoughts, ideas, questions, and responses to anything on the site.

Recovery.gov also features different federal programs, updated information about news related to the stimulus program, and links to related web pages. The screen shot is an early version of the home page.

For the most part, Recovery Act funds are funneled through state and local governments, which manage citizen-facing programs. State governors were given 45 days after the law was signed to claim the funds allocated for their states by certifying that they would "request and use" the funds to create jobs and promote economic growth.

Additional information will be posted on and linked to Recovery.gov as the multi-year spending program is implemented. Over time, it will demonstrate the impact of transparency in government as citizens use it increasingly to build their own understanding of how their taxpayer dollars are being spent.

Recovery.gov is overseen by the Recovery Accountability and Transparency Board, which reports to the Vice President and is responsible for ensuring that federal agencies are transparent and accountable in reporting and spending Recovery Act funds. The Board is composed of 11 inspectors general for federal agencies, led by Earl Devaney of the Department of the Interior. The website is managed by the U.S. General Services Administration. ■

For further information about the website and the distribution of Recovery Act funds, go to www.recovery.gov.

Unfettered Access to Data Can Transform Government

By W. David Stephenson
Principal
Stephenson Strategies

When SEC Chairman Christopher Cox announced in December that, beginning on a phased-in basis this year, corporate reports to the SEC must be filed with XBRL tags so the data would be interactive, he held up a hand-typed SEC report. It was the kind was common during my childhood many years ago, and, Cox said, “When it was published, this was a useful report.”

Back then, gathering and disseminating data was a long and labor-intensive process, so perhaps it was justifiable that data only had to be reported infrequently and only a select few agency leaders had access to it. Unavoidable delays in distributing data made it better for recording past mistakes than guiding daily decisions.

Today, it is technologically possible to have a continuous cycle of data in/data out. There is no longer justification for withholding data (unless there are overriding security and privacy issues) from anyone who legitimately needs it. Today, a “useful” report is a real-time report.

To date, most have focused on access to this data for transparency (for example, the Coburn-Obama Federal Funding Accountability and Transparency Act of 2006), so that the public, watchdog groups and the media can scrutinize it. That is important particularly in light of the controversy about how the first round of money in the financial bailout was (or wasn't!) spent.

To look at data feeds just for



transparency, however, is to ignore some of their more creative uses. Instead, we need to think of “democratizing data,” creating a seamless, continuous data loop in which data is:

- Collected in data bases and warehouses
- Structured (using “tags” such as XML and KML) so that it can easily be queried and seamlessly shared between various systems
- Automatically syndicated so that it is available when and where it is needed, and, ideally, on a real-time basis
- Made available to all workers who need it, in forms they can use to manage their work and collaborate with others
- Made available externally so that watchdog groups can analyze it, as a means to restore public confidence in government's integrity.

- Made available externally in forms that enable civic groups, entrepreneurs and individuals to become “co-creators” with government, integrating into applications, services, and even businesses can use to improve civic life and individuals' lives.

Whether it's public companies that now must meet the new SEC regulations or agencies that must comply with Coburn-Obama, the major cost involved is cleaning up and structuring the data by adding on the “tags.” Once tagged, data can be used and shared anywhere and the time and money spent on adding new uses is negligible.

That portends an exciting transformation for government workers. Many will get access to real-time, location-based information that can really help them do their jobs better, especially if they also have access to data visualization tools (the

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private sector Many Eyes and Swivel sites are good examples) that will help them interpret, make sense of, and share the data.

The District of Columbia used such an approach with a high-priority program to deliver more than 6,000 PCs to public school classrooms. The team charged with executing the project had access to the District's GIS systems, and created custom Google Maps allowing them to deliver and install all of the PCs in only 7 weeks. An earlier plan, without the data-sharing tools, had estimated the project would take a year.

Another example of how real-time access to actionable data can transform government was pointed out by the Neighborhood Knowledge LA (NKLA) project, a collaboration between UCLA and neighborhood groups. They used the Center for Neighborhood Technology's "Neighborhood Early Warning System," which looks at seven indicators of neighborhood decline, such as code violations and/or property taxes in arrears. NKLA's site plots the information on city maps, with each of the seven factors

assigned a different color rectangle. City blocks where multiple indicators are present (and which are at higher risk of serious socio-economic problems) are immediately obvious to users. Because these seven sets of data are typically created by different agencies, it is highly unlikely that they were shared in the past. Agencies that might have previously treated symptoms of decay in isolation can now see which blocks must be addressed first and work together, reducing the cost and increasing their effectiveness.

Finally, democratizing data can facilitate an uncharted area of government innovation, in which the public takes structured data feeds and creates new computer applications that provide real service to the public. The District of Columbia was again the pioneer in this regard, with its "Apps for Democracy" contest in 2008. Design firms and individuals were invited to use one or more of the more than 260 different data feeds in the "Citywide Data Warehouse" to drive applications that would increase transparency or enable public use of the data.

In less than a month, 47 usable applications were created, ranging from do-it-yourself walking historical tours using an iPhone to a "We the People" transparency & accountability wiki to help the public track D.C. spending. The crowdsourcing phenomenon offers access to data and free rein to a wide range of people with differing interests and expertise. BTW: I wonder which agency will be the first to sponsor an internal "Apps for Democracy" contest that allows its employees, no matter whether they're in IT or not, to design a widget or other application that would help their co-workers!

Why stop with accountability if the same mechanism that makes possible automatic delivery of structured data can also help government workers be more productive and even involve citizens in designing innovative applications to supplement traditional governmental services. I'd call that Transparency Plus. ■

W. David Stephenson is an e-gov and Web 2.0 consultant and theorist. He is the lead author of the forthcoming Democratizing Data.

Technology as a Game-Changer

By Darrell M. West
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The goal of electronic government is not just to substitute one delivery system for another. If people go online and print out a report instead of calling up the Food and Drug Administration, that is not a major system transformation. It doesn't change how government functions or how officials think about their mission.

Rather, it is important to think of technology as a "game-changer" that

transforms the culture, organization, and functioning of government. During the campaign, candidate Barack Obama pledged to put detailed public sector information online and make it searchable. He stated that he wanted to create "a centralized Internet database of lobbying reports, ethics records and campaign finance filings in a searchable, sortable and downloadable format." In addition, he

proposed a "contracts and influence database" that publicizes how much money federal contractors receive, how much they spend on lobbying, and how effectively they fulfill government contracts. Improving transparency through online information will be a great boon to researchers, reporters, and ordinary citizens, and make it easier to follow the government money trail.

Digital technology represents a way for government to become more transparent and pro-active in dealing with citizens and businesses. Many government agencies today are reactive in nature. They wait for people to request information or services. However, the Internet allows government agencies to customize information and push

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material out to people. On some government websites, you can register as having interests in particular subjects. Let's say you are a soybean farmer in Iowa and have registered that interest with the U.S. Department of Agriculture website. When new research comes out of Iowa State University on soybeans, or market conditions change, government agencies can email reports to those people and say here is something you should know about. It brings a different mentality to government and puts agencies in the mold of helping people where they want to be helped. You can envision similar applications in health care,

Digital tools offer the potential to involve more people in decision-making. Before President Obama signs legislation, he plans to wait five days to allow for public comments. People will be able to go to a website and say, "Yes, you should sign this bill" or "No, you shouldn't, and these are the reasons why you shouldn't." In the same vein, the Environmental Protection Agency has been using e-rulemaking on proposed federal regulations to broaden citizen participation in government. The Brookings Press is publishing a book entitled *Wiki-Government* by Beth Noveck formerly a professor at New York Law School, and now in the

domestic agenda (health care reform).

There are 13 million email addresses in the Obama campaign database. After the election, the campaign sent a survey to each of these, asking for zip code, phone number, issue interests (such as gay rights, disability, health care, or education), and willingness to contact public officials. It is obvious what Obama is going to do with this information. When tough votes come before Congress, he is going to ask supporters to contact legislators in same way President Reagan did in 1981 with letters and phone calls when he wanted to pass his landmark

It is important to think of technology as a "game-changer" that transforms the culture, organization, and functioning of government.

education, climate change, and variety of other areas. If someone attends a public school in Cleveland, Ohio, local education officials can notify parents of important developments affecting that school. Hospitals can target people interested in staying up-to-date on diabetes treatments by sending them material on new research in the area.

Information technology provides feedback on how agencies are doing. I visited China a couple of years ago as part of a technology delegation. Going through passport control when we landed at the Beijing Airport, I noticed an electronic device that asked me to rate the performance of the passport officer on a 1 to 4 scale. This represented an innovative example of introducing transparency and accountability into the system. If there is a spike upward in complaints about a particular official or specific agency, administrators know there is a problem and this feedback provides an opportunity to address inadequate performance.

Office of Science and Technology Policy at the White House. It is terrific research on how governments can harness the power of collective knowledge in decision-making. She proposes that agencies such as the Patent and Trademark Office set up wikis in which people can comment on proposed patents and help authorities decide what truly is new.

The digital revolution gives political leaders a way to bring outside pressure to bear on Congress and thereby help break the partisan gridlock that has plagued our national government for years. There has been inaction on leading issues such as health care, Social Security, climate change, and immigration. President Obama has substantial Democratic majorities in the House and Senate, but he should remember that Presidents Jimmy Carter and Bill Clinton had the same thing early in each of their administrations. Neither of those Democratic presidents was able to get much passed and Clinton was not able to get Congress to take a single vote on the centerpiece of his

tax cut legislation. Electronic technology will allow Obama to harness his grass roots movement to further his political objectives.

When you add all these things together, Obama has the potential to use technology to improve government transparency and reinvigorate democracy. His most important challenge, though, will be public and media cynicism. Public trust in government is at an all-time low. When people are cynical, they don't believe anyone really is going to make a difference. But if Obama can maintain the sense of hope, he will become our first truly digital president. ■

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Information as a Public Good

By Sean Gorman, PhD
CEO and Founder
FortiusOne

Introduction

The new administration has made transparent and open government a top priority. As part of this mission, agencies are encouraged to “harness new technologies to put information about their operations and decisions online and readily available to the public.” Further, agencies are asked to view information as a “national asset” to be shared with the citizens. I would contend that the information

asking agencies to share with citizens can be viewed as a public good. If the EPA makes information on the location of toxic dumping available, and I use that data to inform my neighborhood of hazards, I have not inhibited anyone else from using the data for other purposes. There is a societal benefit to making information open and available to the public.

This concept is not new, but if we connect the idea to technology there

with companies and non-profits taking open government data and creating sophisticated technology and services around them. A stellar example of this is the phenomenal growth of Web-based geospatial technologies – often called the GeoWeb. Google Earth uses data from NASA, NOAA, U.S. Navy, National Geo-spatial-Intelligence Agency and other government agencies to create the virtual panoramas of our planet.

The government can make information available as reports, maps and charts, but it can also make it available as data.

President Obama is asking government to share with citizens is a public good. If we view information as a public good then there is the opportunity to not only create transparency but also save government resources and money while stimulating the economy. First we need to clearly define the meaning of 'public good.'

Information as a Public Good

In economics the concept of a “public good” describes a situation in which the consumption of a good or service by one individual does not reduce availability of the good or service for others; therefore no one can be excluded from using it. A classic example of a public good is a lighthouse. All ships benefit from the lighthouse, and if more ships benefit from the lighthouse that does not adversely affect the community of ships. As opposed to an apple which is a finite resource. If I take a bite of the apple, there is less of the apple for you. From this perspective, the information President Obama is

is the opportunity to create even greater benefits beyond transparency. The government can make information available as reports, maps and charts, but it can also make it available as data. Specifically, government can provide the raw source data that is the foundation for reports and statistics. The first benefit of this approach is that it provides greater transparency of government. Any individual or group would be able to check the validity of statistics and conclusions drawn from information produced by the government. This provides another avenue for citizens to participate and collaborate with government.

The GeoWeb as a Use Case

From a technology perspective, open data has the positive externality of creating opportunities for citizens and “the market” to innovate with the data. If the government can provide well-organized data in common formats, then technology and services can be built on top of the data. There has been enormous success already

EveryBlock

Another innovative example is Everyblock, a web application that combines metropolitan data like crime, road construction, building permits, and sanitation violations statistics and makes information easily accessible to the public for consumption. The image below shows the results for recent crimes in the Federal Triangle neighborhood of Washington D.C.

In both instances open public data is being made available to the public in an attractive and consumable form. Not only do these applications make the data more transparent, they have also fueled innovation and business creation.

Apps for Democracy

Vivek Kundra, the former D.C. CTO has leveraged the combination of open government data with the technology community to great success. He made D.C. government data open to the public in common formats then ran a contest, “Apps for

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Apps for Democracy

An Innovation Contest

for the



Got what it takes to mash-up DC's data to win some cash and tons of street cred?

Then sign-up for Apps for Democracy and start coding here!

Submissions are now closed.
Click here to view all 47 application submissions and vote for your favorites!

Democracy," for developers to create innovative applications with the data. This contest resulted in the development and submission of 47 applications. The D.C. CTO's office estimated that the cost of having the D.C. government develop these apps would have exceeded \$2 million and required 1-2 years of effort between contracting, procurement and development. The contest cost a total of \$50,000 and was delivered in 30 days. Not only did Kundra's efforts enable more transparency around D.C. Government, they also saved the city a substantial amount of money.

OpenStreetMap

The benefits to government of making data public do not stop with saving money. In the United Kingdom, much of the data produced by the government is sold for a fee. This is especially true in the case of geospatial data, where the Ordnance Survey charges large sums of money for a variety of geospatial data. This led to the creation of a non-profit project called OpenStreetMaps, where volunteers use consumer GPS units and Web software to map out street infrastructure. The project has gone global with more than 80,000

contributors and 800 million data points. When OpenStreetMap came to the United States, the Census Bureau's TIGER line street data were already available in the public domain. This provided a huge jump-start for OpenStreetMap and the team quickly began updating and correcting errors in the data.

Now there is a resource with updated and more accurate TIGER data available for the public. This cost Census no additional resources and no additional budget. In addition, the data made available by OpenStreetMap has provided the foundation for several technology start-ups creating new jobs and innovation in the marketplace.

Conclusion

All four examples; Google Earth, EveryBlock, Apps for Democracy and OpenStreetMap, demonstrate the potential of leveraging government data as a public good. The public has greatly benefited from the technologies built around the data, and the use of the data has not removed value from the government. In fact the government has gained – saving money, saving resources,

receiving higher quality data in return, and arguably the data has driven production of technology applications that the government would have contracted for. Further, the government has created an economic stimulus by providing data around which business can be built. Of special significance is the innovation-based economic stimulus for small and medium sized businesses, which are the backbone of America's job creation engine. Most importantly, these projects and the approaches outlined serve the purpose of making government more transparent and inviting greater participation and collaboration. Each of these examples built a community around the data that is passionate about both its accuracy and application. We have a collective opportunity to promote change that will revitalize the economy and society, and this is one path that will get us closer to those lofty goals. ■

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Citizen Views On Transparency

By Suzanne J. Piotrowski and
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The proper balance between governmental secrecy and open government is at the forefront of contemporary public debate. Intuitively, it seems individuals differ in their level of demand for governmental transparency. Governmental transparency is the degree to which there is access to government-held information. Some feel strongly about the need to access government information and to learn more about what government is doing, whereas others are less interested.

Research Method

The data for our analysis come from an online survey conducted in March 2005 of participants in the eTownPanel project, an opt-in e-mail panel of approximately 6,044 active participants (at the time of the study). The eTownPanel project is a university-affiliated, foundation-funded online research resource created to provide a general population of volunteers to participate in surveys about local

there are several dimensions to the public's demand for transparency, including fiscal, safety, and government concerns, and principled openness. Age, political ideology, confidence in government leaders, frequency of contacting government, and especially the perception that there is currently not enough access to government appear to drive the public's demand for transparency, although determinants differ for each dimension. Some, although not all, of these factors also predict citizens'

Those who view government as already adequately open demand less transparency, whereas those who see government as closed seek more.

Moreover, people differ in terms of the kinds of government information they seek to access. Using data from a national online survey, we develop several indices to measure citizens' demand for local governmental transparency and to identify its correlates.

Two initial questions are addressed in this study: (a) How can we measure citizens' desire or demand for governmental transparency, and specifically, are there different dimensions to such a demand? and (b) What personal and contextual factors are correlated with variation in the level of demand for governmental transparency? We focus on local government transparency because citizens have a more direct stake in local issues (like crime and land use) and because the data for our research, explained more fully below, come from a survey research project focused on local government affairs.

community issues and government performance, in particular surveys sponsored by local nonprofit organizations, government agencies, and academic researchers. Volunteers are recruited from various online postings and e-mail lists and are not a random sample of the U.S. population. Invitations were sent via e-mail to the entire panel, and a total of 1,819 completed the questionnaire, for a panel response rate of 30percent.

The survey asked a large number of questions about transparency in government, as well as questions about other attitudes and behaviors that were hypothesized to be potential correlates or determinants of the demand for transparency. We conducted an exploratory factor analysis to reduce the transparency items and to create scales.

Findings

The data and analysis suggest that

actual requests for government information.

Our analysis reveals some insights on the structure and possible determinants of public demand for transparency at the local level. There appear to be potentially different dimensions to the public's demand for governmental transparency, dimensions related to public finances, safety, the principle of open government, and the notion of good or honest government. In addition, our analysis suggests several key determinants of these various forms of public demand for transparency. Perhaps the public's perception of how much openness currently exists in government emerges as a significant factor across the various measures of demand for transparency. Those who view government as already adequately open demand less transparency, whereas those who see government as closed seek more. People who are politically engaged

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and who frequently contact government also tend to demand more transparency.

The trust-in-government literature has found that there is a relationship between trust in government and the perception that democracy is “working well.” In three of the five scales, confidence in local officials had a statistically significant, negative relationship to demand for

Finally, a number of potential predictors we expected to be related to the demand for transparency failed to enter significantly into our models. Although past literature identifies race as related to trust in government and satisfaction with government services, race was not related to attitudes toward transparency. Race was, however, related to the behavior of obtaining government documents.

these issues to either confirm or disprove the expected relationships.

This research begins to develop a way of measuring dimensions of the public's demand for transparency, and some of the determinants of these dimensions. Because no previous research has attempted to measure these concepts, this study should be seen as providing an exploratory, empirical foundation for future work

People who are politically engaged and who frequently contact government also tend to demand more transparency.

transparency. The more confidence citizens have in their local officials, the less they are interested in fiscal, principled, and good government transparency. Senator John Cornyn of Texas stated that “open government is fundamentally an American issue, not a Republican or Democrat issue.” Using party affiliation as a proxy for ideology, Republican Cornyn is half right. Self-identified conservatives and liberals were both interested in transparency, just different types of transparency. Although conservatives questioned the need for transparency more than liberals, they also were more concerned than liberals about accessing safety-related information. Self-identified liberals, on the other hand, were more concerned with accessing government information on principle and for good governance concerns.

Conclusions

Our questionnaire focused almost exclusively on the municipal government level. This is appropriate because individuals have so much of their government contact at the local level. Even with this in mind, it is possible that national-level issues affect individuals' demand for transparency of local-level documents, the most obvious of which are national defense and homeland security. A question, or series of questions, ascertaining respondents' views on these topics could be included in future research. The perceived high cost of governmental transparency and the desire for personal privacy are two possible reasons why individuals may want less transparency. Future research should include questions that address

on the topic. The results presented provide both predicted and surprising results. More thought and attention needs to be turned to this topic to better understand the link between demand for transparency and its potential correlates. ■

This is based on a research article titled “Citizen Attitudes Toward Transparency in Local Government” published in the in The American Review of Public Administration (2007; volume 37 No.3 p306-323). Suzanne Piotrowski and Gregg Van Ryzin are both faculty members of the School of Public Affairs and Administration at Rutgers University-Newark. For additional information contact spiotrow@rutgers.edu and vanryzin@rutgers.edu.

Texas Websites Improve Accountability

By Susan Combs
Comptroller
State of Texas

In the Texas State Comptroller's Office, we continuously pore over budgets in keeping the books for our agency and the State of Texas as a whole — a large task, and one that should be open to scrutiny. By my fourth day as Comptroller, we published all of our agency expenditures online, right down to the pencils. And thanks to our *Where the Money Goes* website, our expenditures and those of other state agencies are available and easily searchable online.

In these tough economic times, all taxpayers — at the city, county, state and federal levels — deserve to know their tax dollars are used wisely. Just as working families must cut expenses and look for ways to save, all governments must tighten their belts and make the most of every dollar.

Our office endeavors to do its part in improving Texas government transparency, and some of our initiatives may stand as templates for other governments in crafting transparency initiatives. Taking a common-sense approach to the issue, we recently introduced Open Book Texas, a three-part set of initiatives aimed at improving government accounting accuracy, spending and transparency.

First Initiative: Single Set of Books

To shine more light on state agency bookkeeping, beyond our *Where the Money Goes* online expenditure database, we are pursuing an initiative to introduce more uniformity in Texas government accounting.

In 2007, the Texas Legislature asked the Comptroller's office to create an advisory council with other state agencies to examine uniform financial accounting in state government.

Today, Texas state agencies use many sets of books with sometimes conflicting accounting data. Any given agency might use its own bookkeeping methods and codes for tracking and classifying items, a recipe for duplication that can make accurate statewide bookkeeping an enormous challenge. With the Single Set of Books Initiative, our office will work with agencies to present a report to the Legislature on ways that state accounting systems and processes can be made more accurate and useful in decision-making.

Uniform financial reporting across all state agencies and higher education institutions will shine the brightest light on the state's finances and allow state leaders to obtain real-time, reliable information to make well-informed decisions.

Second Initiative: Texas Smart Buy

Transparency helps spotlight spending inefficiencies after the fact, and our office also works to make Texas state government a better shopper from the outset. That is where Texas Smart Buy helps.

The initiative gives agencies and local governments access to an online shopping cart — much like shopping at popular online retailers — that allows them to purchase goods and services through state-negotiated contracts. By purchasing from those

contracts, individual purchasers can leverage the state of state's bulk buying power to receive lower prices.

Our office expects Texas to save at least \$28 million in phase one of Texas Smart Buy. The savings and cost-avoidance represent more than 8 percent of state spending for certain goods and services. Already, Texas has identified these savings and cost avoidances:

- Overnight/express mail — the state saved 34 percent, or \$3.8 million, and awarded a significant portion of this contract to a Texas-based vendor.
- Outgoing mail machines — the state saved 20 percent, or \$876,000, by negotiating a new contract with a long-time vendor.
- Fleet — the state expects to save \$7 million on fleet vehicles through contract negotiations. Also, for the first time, the state will look beyond the sticker price to consider the cost of fueling vehicles for 100,000 miles.

As one of the largest purchasing entities in the nation, our state is making that leverage work for us. For years, families have used strategies like buying in bulk to save money, and it makes sense for governments to have the same option.

Third Initiative: Texas Transparency Check-Up

With the rollout of a new website, *Texas Transparency Check-Up*, our office expands on previous online accountability efforts and encourages transparency at all levels of Texas

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Open Book Texas

Susan Combs Texas Comptroller of Public Accounts

Hardworking Texans annually pay millions of dollars in taxes. Those funds are used to run the vast and complex business of Texas. As the population grows, so does the demand for services and the need for government to find every efficiency. That starts with opening the books to view, analyze and identify ways to spend smarter and stretch every penny. This portal offers a round-up of these initiatives.



TxSmartBuy.com

Get details on ways the state is analyzing its expenses and leveraging its buying power with strategic procurement to ensure the best value for state and local government. [GO](#)



See how local governments in Texas are giving a transparent look at their books in this Comptroller round-up. [GO](#)



Single Set of Books

Learn more about the Comptroller-led study of what a single set of books could mean for Texas by implementing uniform financial accounting. [GO](#)

Texas Online | Statewide Search from the Texas State Library | State Link Policy | Texas Homeland Security

Susan Combs, Texas Comptroller • Window on State Government • Contact Us
 Privacy and Security Policy | Accessibility Policy | Link Policy | Public Information Act | Compact with Texans

government finance. The website offers transparency guidance to local governments and provides Texans an opportunity to see how well their local governments stack up in offering online access to financial information.

In implementing this initiative, we researched the financial transparency of the top 50 Texas cities, Texas counties, school districts and other local entities. *Texas Transparency Check-Up* reveals the results. The site also offers local governments step-by-step advice for posting information online and presenting it in a way that is readable and understandable to the

public.

The website highlights local government success stories, provides links to exemplary local government websites and gives taxpayers tips to ensure that their government is open and accountable.

When you know what you are spending, you know how to spend better. Our office is committed to seeing that philosophy spread to every level of government. In the age of the Internet, there is seldom a reason to not publish public information online.

Transparency and wise spending are important during the best of times and absolutely essential in an uncertain economy where there are no dollars to waste. To operate with the utmost integrity, all governments should show the same common sense, resourcefulness and thrift when spending money as taxpayers. ■

Susan Combs was elected Texas Comptroller of Public Accounts in November of 2006. For an in-depth look at Open Book Texas initiatives, visit www.window.state.tx.us/openbook.

Georgia's Commitment to Customer Service and Good Government

By the Georgia Governor's Office of Communications and the Georgia Secretary of State's Office of Media Relations

Georgia elected officials show a commitment to government transparency and high ethical standards through the use of technology. Through the Open Georgia website (www.open.georgia.gov) and the Secretary of State's Transparency in Government website (<http://www.sos.georgia.gov/TIG>), citizens have direct access to detailed accounts of government spending.

The Open Georgia site was created by the Transparency in Government Act and formally launched on January 5, 2009.

"The Open Georgia website makes state government more transparent to its customer, the taxpayer," said Georgia Governor Sonny Perdue at the time. "By being willing to further open the halls of government to the public, we give citizens more confidence that their tax dollars are being spent wisely."

"We have taken a major step towards fully open and easily accessible accounting of how every state tax dollar is spent," said its sponsor State Senator Chip Roberts. "The very best way to prevent wasteful government spending is to let those paying the bills see exactly where their money is going."

Open Georgia allows citizens online access to agency expenditures on professional services, employee salaries and travel expenses, state financial reports and program reviews. In the Salaries and Travel Reimbursements section, the public can find salaries and travel reimbursements paid to employees of the state and employees of local boards of education. The "professional Services and Expenditure" section of

the website allows you to find professional services expenditures made by state organizations. Open Georgia also includes financial reports containing the Comprehensive Annual Financial Report, budgetary compliance reports, the Budget in Brief and single audits. The site allows Georgians to review payments to vendors doing business with the state during the two previous fiscal years.

The website also allows citizens to search for reports that evaluate how well various state programs are operating, including performance audits, program evaluations, and special examinations released by the Department of Audits and Accounts over the last five years. In 2010, it will be expanded to include grant and contact payments to vendors by state agencies.

There are numerous ways to search for salary and vendor information. Users can search by name, title, description and agency and export search results to Microsoft Excel or Adobe .pdf formats.

To ensure that the website is able to carry out its mission the state has trained operators at its main phone number, 1-800-GEORGIA, to direct citizens to a specific web address or to answer detailed questions about the state's performance. The commitment to provide further details on spending is part of a larger commitment from the state to make government more customer-friendly.

Georgia Secretary of State Karen Handel has demonstrated a commitment to government transparency, ethics and responsible stewardship of taxpayer dollars through her agency's Transparency in

Government initiative. Georgians can access her agency's budget and monthly expenditures, with detailed information on spending categories. The Secretary of State's website highlights the agency's ethics policy and Secretary Handel's personal and campaign financial disclosures.

"Responsible fiscal management begins with a commitment to transparency and accountability," She said. "Georgia taxpayers deserve to know how their tax dollars are being spent, and I am pleased to provide them with that information."

In addition to these new tools, Georgia lawmakers continue to look for additional ways to make public information easily accessible. Rep. Ed Lindsey introduced legislation in the 2009 session of the General Assembly that would require counties, cities and school boards with budgets over \$1 million to develop a free, searchable website that would include all sources of revenue, itemized by amount; the entity's annual budget; a list of all contracts and obligations of more than \$1,000; and an itemization of salaries and other expenses paid to all public officials and employees.

Georgia officials know government functions best when it is made accountable to the citizens who fund it. Georgia's dedication to making information easily accessible demonstrates that the state continues to lead the way in truly becoming a citizen-friendly government. ■

For additional information, please contact the Georgia Governor's Office of Communications at 404-651-7774, or the Georgia Secretary of State's Office of Media Relations at 404-656-4269.

Transparency 2.0

By Laurence Millar
Deputy Commissioner and Government CIO
State Services Commission
New Zealand

Thanks to the popularity of the term Web 2.0, the suffix '2.0' is being applied to just about anything. However, there is one benefit from this indiscriminate labelling. It helps frame some important questions—What is the current 1.0 state? What are the limitations of the 1.0 state? What are the drivers for the 2.0 state? Finally, how do we get there?

Transparency 1.0

The people's right to know is a central pillar of democratic societies. Transparency, which gives effect to this right, is a critical element for building and maintaining trust in government. Effectively holding government accountable for services, decisions, and spending taxpayers' money depends on transparency.

Transparency 1.0 is underpinned by a legislative framework. For example, in New Zealand the *Official Information Act* allows people, with very few exceptions, to get the information they want from ministers and government organisations. Fiscal transparency is mandated by the *Public Finance Act* and the *Reserve Bank of New Zealand Act*.

Our robust transparency regime has been internationally recognised. New Zealand is joint first with Denmark and Sweden on Transparency International's 2008 Corruption Perception Index (see www.transparency.org). While the list leaders have changed over the years, New Zealand remains near the top. This isn't by resting on previous achievements but by actively working on openness, trust, and transparency.

The legislative framework is complemented by other measures,

mostly by individual agencies. The State Services Commission, in its leadership role of the State Services, provides information and metrics at an all-of-government level. Two notable examples are the *Kiwis Count* survey, which looks at perceptions of the public service, and the annual *Human Resource Capability* survey of the government workforce.

Limitations of the 1.0 state

There is always room for improvement. For example, the potential to better systematise the release of government information and to improve the operation of the Official Information Act has been identified.

Notwithstanding the improvements that can and should be made to the current transparency regime, there are limitations inherent in the dynamic and mindset that Transparency 1.0 addresses. Either people ask for information and government responds or the government makes it available under a legislative or good-practice imperative. The underlying assumption is one of inequality; a mindset of opposing interests that requires a watchdog.

In this situation, transparency provides a vital check and balance dynamic. However, Transparency 1.0 by its very nature cannot act as a major enabling lever that uses transparency's potential to fundamentally transform the relationship between people and government.

Change drivers

The easiest way to describe the drivers of change is to point to the emergence of Web 2.0. The average person now has the capability --

processing power, tools, bandwidth, and mobile computing -- that was previously only available to large organisations and governments. Futurists point to non-linear change which means that people's capabilities will only accelerate.

The Web has gone from read-only to read-write. The 2.0 dynamic is very different from the 1.0 state. People are treated as partners, equals in pursuit of shared outcomes and common goals. In turn, this is driving the expectations that people have of government.

Change is happening now.

There are too many examples around the world to ignore. Oft-quoted examples include New Zealand's TheyWorkForYou and the UK's FixMyStreet. Less well known but equally powerful is Sami Ben Gharbia's campaign out of the Netherlands to highlight the issue of political prisoners in Tunisia. His efforts include a Google map mashup of the semi-secret locations where the prisoners are being held with YouTube videos and a blog.

Getting to Transparency 2.0

Three things can facilitate Transparency 2.0 and enhance public value.

First, the default should be that all non-personal data and information held by government is publicly available. This requires a huge shift in attitudes and practices and is therefore likely to be part of a larger renewal of the democratic fabric. It is a worthy goal and even incremental steps are welcome. The Scandinavian countries present good examples of what can be achieved.

Second, data and information should be freely available and usable. This means it is easy to find; in open machine-readable formats; has adequate metadata; licensing is standardised with no or minimal constraints on reuse; pricing is reasonable (zero cost being the norm);

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and it is timely.

Finally, there needs to be a shift to genuine dialogue; with two-way conversations and participation replacing consultation. Key enablers are a reduction of information asymmetries and the development of mutual respect.

Within the New Zealand State Services there have been a few tentative steps towards this goal. It's blog *In Development* (<http://blog.e-govt.nz>) allows for a much richer and ongoing conversation between officials and people. Public inputs into revamping the Police Act in 2007 used a wiki with some success. A community forum was also used in 2007 to discuss and come up with ways to increase road safety. A broadband map provides transparency of supply and demand National Broadband Map homepage (<http://broadbandmap.govt.nz/map>) on the leading to better

investment decisions and wider choice.

These are still the exception rather than business as usual. They are however beginning to have a small but real impact on outcomes and are promising signs of the dawn of Transparency 2.0.

One of the challenges is measuring progress. A promising framework to measure transparency in this new era has been put forward by European Commission researcher David Osimo. Osimo contends that the model currently being used to measure e-government progress is outdated and based on an old vision of government. To accurately measure progress in a Web 2.0 world, the Osimo model has four stages of transparency and reusability of public data (from no information to reusable and machine-readable data).

Key Message

Our vision is "A world class system of professional State Services serving the government of the day and meeting the needs of New Zealanders." These needs are changing, now more than ever, and therefore the State Services needs to change. One good response is to develop a new level of transparency fit for the 21st century - call it Transparency 2.0 or something else - even as we strengthen our current transparency regime.

This new level of transparency will be based on a win-win dynamic. Government will work with communities as a partner, jointly achieving the public outcomes that society wants. ■

Laurence Millar is the first New Zealand Government CIO. For additional information contact Laurence.Millar@ssc.govt.nz.

Measuring E-Government 2.0

By David Osimo
Tech4i2 Ltd

In the context of e-government policies, measurement tools have enjoyed high success over the last ten years. Following the management mantra "if you can't measure it, you can't manage it," policy makers have looked for robust measurement tools to support decisions. A considerable number of initiatives have been established, at the regional and global levels. The UN global e-government survey, the Brown global e-government report, the European benchmarking e-government survey, are three well known examples, all based on a human assessment of government websites.

One of the reasons behind this flourishing of measurement tools is the actual difficulty for policy-makers to manage e-government and show its

benefits. The technical nature of e-government calls for non-technical management tools which are able to inform political discussion and decisions. In other words, measurement and benchmarking has become an essential tool to steer and shape e-government policies.

In Europe, in particular, benchmarking plays a particularly important role to coordinate policy measures across different European Union Member States. The European approach to measuring e-government has been highly successful in establishing a simple, robust and easily understandable measurement method. This metric has become very influential among policy-makers: several countries set a specific goal in

their e-government strategies such as "being among the first three countries in two years." However, the traditional approach to e-government measurement is no longer satisfactory, because it focuses on the availability of online services (e.g. the possibility to pay taxes online). The results of this traditional policy focus are not particularly encouraging: these services are still **very little used**, and there is little evidence of the much expected radical change in the bureaucratic **culture** of the public administration, which was supposed to become more efficient and customer-oriented through IT investment.

In fact, raising the issue of a new benchmarking approach points to the wider need for a new e-government vision, which focuses on the values of communication and information – something like an e-government 2.0 vision. If putting services online was the "flagship goal" of e-government policy in the web 1.0 era, what policy priority will play a similar role in the Web 2.0 era?

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We argue that just as the flagship goal of e-government has been until now “making services available online,” the new flagship goal should be transparency, “making public data available for reuse.”

The most successful web 2.0 initiatives in the public field—such as farmsubsidy.org and theyworkforyou.org in the EU, everyblock.com and the various initiatives of the Sunlight Foundation in the US—are built on reusing government data in order to enhance transparency and accountability of government. One of the main barriers to a wider diffusion of such initiatives is the lack of available and easily reusable data. Too much time is spent scraping and cleaning public data in order to make it usable. In December 2007, 30 open-government advocates spelled key requirements for government data which emphasized the need for easily accessible, machine-processable and highly reusable data. This would dramatically reduce the barriers to developing web-based applications that bring social value, as it has been recently shown by the appsfordemocracy.org initiative.

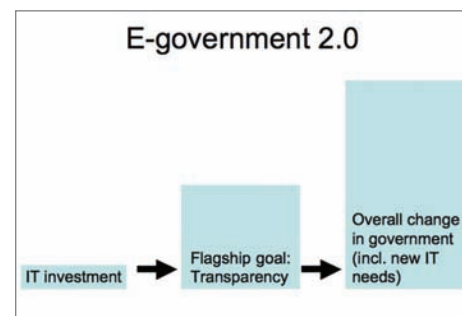
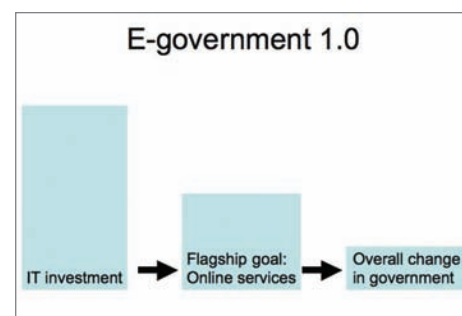
Web 2.0 applications are particularly good at making data easy to

understand and meaningful. For example, through visualization tools, government can no longer hide behind analysis and charts they themselves provide. Only reusable data make transparency a reality because they enable new intermediaries to make sense of public data and openly discuss them.

Reusable data are important because they change the incentives of government behaviour. The publicity of citizens’ feedback induces civil servants to be more responsive to citizens. The visualization of voting behaviour of politicians makes them more responsive to voters.

Traditional e-government initiatives require cultural change to generate a positive change. Web 2.0 applications create cultural change by altering the incentives behind government behaviour. Moreover, the expenditure to make public data available is much smaller than the investment to make services available online.

We propose a new approach to measurement of e-government, which, rather than measuring the availability of online services, measures the availability of reusable and machine-processable data.



The proposal tries to combine the simplicity and feasibility of the EU approach with the new values of Web 2.0. It identifies a limited set of “basic public data” and it proposes 4 stages of data availability.

The key benefit of this approach is that not only does it provide a way to monitor the degree of transparency of different governments, but also it creates a peer-pressure mechanism towards the publication of reusable data. It provides a clear roadmap to policy-makers where the publication of reusable, machine processable data is the ultimate goal of e-government.

Further work is needed to define priority data, refine the stages and the appropriate format of data, and pilot the methodology. However, consistent with the Web 2.0 approach, this measurement does not have to be implemented by government. It is quite easy to imagine a crowdsourcing scenario, where an NGO provides an online, free data-collection tool, through which citizens can input information on the availability of reusable data on the website of their municipality. ■

David Osimo is a managing partner of Tech4i2 Ltd. For additional information contact david.osimo@gmail.com.

Benchmarking e-government 2.0	
Phase 1	Select 20 types of basic public data such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • beneficiaries of public funding (agriculture, research, industry etc); • draft legislation; • MPs votes • party donations • planning applications; • air pollution data • citizens feedback / satisfaction surveys results • procurement contract assigned
Phase 2	For each type, assess to what extent these data are available on the web: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 0 (no information available) 1 (description of the procedure to obtain the information through Freedom of Information) 2 (information available in non reusable, non-machine readable format) 3 (information available in reusable and machine processable format such as xml , csv)
Phase 3	Compute “data availability” scores for each country based on an average the scores for each type of data.
Phase 4	Compare the average scores for the countries being benchmarked and develop international rankings.

E-discovery, Transparency and Culture Change

By Jason R. Baron, Esq.

The December 2006 changes to the Federal Rules of Civil Procedure, which introduced the term “electronically stored information,” are transforming the way federal court litigation is being practiced in the United States. In literally hundreds of published decisions, courts are applying greater scrutiny to electronically stored information, concentrating on how electronic forms of documents and records will be preserved, formatted, searched, and produced in the context of the particular case. For the public sector, this is not just the sound of distant thunder. Increasingly, federal agencies are being required to confront how their electronic records will be produced in litigation.

Brave New World, Part 1: In a decision dated January 6, 2009, the U.S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia affirmed a finding of contempt against The Office of Federal Housing Enterprise Oversight, in large part due to the agency's failure to meet stipulated-to deadlines in e-discovery. The agency had committed to undertaking an “appropriate search” of disaster-recovery backup tapes for documents. It was an agreement to produce non-privileged documents found responsive to 400 overly-broad keyword search terms, where the production set consisted of 660,000 recovered documents that needed to be, but could not be, reviewed in time. The Court of Appeals was not moved to relieve the agency of its contempt citation, despite the fact that it had spent \$ 6 million, or more than 9 percent of its total annual budget in connection with conducting the search. See *In re Fannie Mae Litigation*, 2009 WL 21528 (D.C. Cir.), available at <http://pacer.cad.c.uscourts.gov/commo n/opinions/ 200901.htm>.

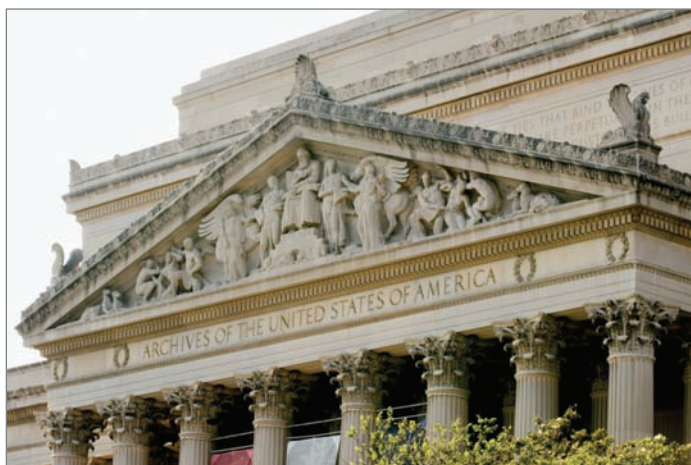
Brave New World, Part 2: In a civil rights class action brought against the Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) Division of the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, a federal district court in Manhattan considered at length the discoverability of at least three types of “metadata” associated with ICE records.

These are: “substantive” metadata consisting of textual modifications to documents and editorial comments embedded within documents that are retained by the proprietary software and retrievable by end users; “system” metadata, consisting of date and time of creation of

documents or when documents were modified, including material that might have been deleted by the creator of the document; and “embedded” metadata, consisting of spreadsheet formulas, hidden columns, and hyperlinks. The government largely prevailed on a technicality, due to plaintiffs’ failure to timely raise the metadata issue: although the next set of class action plaintiffs almost assuredly won’t be making that same mistake. See *Aguilar v. ICE Division of the U.S. Dep’t of Homeland Security*, 2008 WL 5062700 (S.D.N.Y. Nov. 21, 2008).

Each new e-discovery ruling consists of a wake up call to the federal agency involved. In these and similar cases, agencies come to realize (usually, after the fact), that they must get a better handle on the downside risk posed by a failure to be prepared for e-discovery. Today, federal courts seriously

entertaining requiring (a) the production of electronic versions of records with associated “metadata,” even if hard copies exist in “official” recordkeeping systems, and/or (b) expedited searches of hundreds of thousands or millions of e-mails, including from backup tapes, even if such media and systems are not set up to handle that kind of demand. Of course, the government retains viable affirmative defenses against truly unreasonable and burdensome litigation search and production demands, as well it should. But federal agencies are whistling past the graveyard if they believe that existing forms of recordkeeping remain



adequate in the face of these new external realities.

E-discovery places in sharp relief the present-day Achilles heel of “e-government,” namely: while virtually all desktop government records are born digital, only a small percentage end up being “preserved” in a electronic recordkeeping system approved by the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA), pursuant to the Federal Records Act. Few agencies have switched to managing information electronically in a manner consistent with the NARA-endorsed standard for electronic recordkeeping. The vast majority of agencies instead are still relying on legacy records schedules that assume hard copy printouts of e-mail, word processing, and other applications suffice as the official records of the agency. Little or

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no attention is being paid to preserving in a coherent, uniform, and consistent fashion potentially large numbers of electronic communications on otherwise highly networked systems that constitute long-term temporary or permanent federal records. As a consequence, government agencies are at least two steps behind when confronted with a serious and sophisticated e-discovery demand. They routinely have trouble collecting and preserving records in their native, proprietary form (with metadata), and they have trouble searching them in a reasonable way – especially if they must rely on the enormous expense of restoring disaster-recovery backup tapes to do so.

The “print-to-paper” world of government recordkeeping has continued to survive the Electronic Freedom of Information Act, the Government Paperwork Elimination Act, the E-Government Act, and a host of similar statutes. With limited exceptions, federal agencies generally have failed to adopt modern, efficient means of preserving e-mail and other forms of unstructured electronic records on the desktop, in a manner that upholds the highest ideals of the recordkeeping laws.

Ironically, the place in government generating the most public controversy for flaws in its recordkeeping system, namely the White House, actually has remained comparatively ahead of the curve. Notwithstanding allegations of “missing” e-mail, approximately 32 million Clinton e-mail records, and now on the order of ten times that amount of Bush 43 e-mail records, have been preserved in electronic form under the Presidential Records Act and the Federal Records Act.

No other place in government has so far approached this volume of wholesale e-mail capture under the public records laws, although some have begun to contemplate the idea of “e-mail archiving,” which holds out the promise of a “quick fix” to litigation risk, especially from an IT perspective, where the agency “just” saves everything. Such technologies remove

e-mail from the mail server to manage it in a central location, without much or any effort on the part of individual users. Agencies considering e-mail archiving without also thinking through its records management implications exchange short-term litigation risk in terms of deleted information, for the expense and attendant risk associated with building up huge, unstructured data collections that cannot be adequately managed or searched. The adoption of e-mail archiving combined with appropriate records management controls and filters may well be a constructive step forward, however. Agencies moving toward the adoption of such new technologies should, in my view, be applauded in thinking outside the present “only hard copies are official records” box. For additional guidance, see NARA Bulletin 2008-05 (Guidance concerning the use of e-mail archiving applications to store e-mail), available at <http://www.archives.gov/records-mgmt/bulletins/2008/2008-05.html>.

The business case for adopting electronic recordkeeping should be apparent. E-discovery increases risks exponentially for agencies that rely on paper, on backup tapes, and on end users to respond to discovery obligations. Agencies must begin to treat information as critical assets to be managed strategically, which increasingly will mean managing information electronically. They should be working to transform current business practices to truly embrace e-government in cradle-to-grave workflow processes, from record creation through ultimate disposition.

My six prescriptions for change include federal agencies:

- Committing to electronic recordkeeping and/or e-mail archiving with records management controls in place;
- Embracing preventive measures in the form of ad hoc, interdisciplinary groups of professionals (records officers, attorneys, CIOs and IT staff, and senior executives), meeting to discuss the future e-discovery risks

each agency faces;

- Improving their baseline knowledge management of their own information assets, starting with inventorying and/or data mapping all agency ESI repositories, applications, and platforms in anticipation of discovery about those very subjects;
- Changing workflow to support electronic business processes;
- Updating legacy records schedules and ensuring that unscheduled electronic records (in the form of databases or on network applications) are properly scheduled; and
- Appointing a “knowledge counsel” who will be the “go to” person in each headquarters and regional component of a General Counsel’s or Solicitor’s office, who would function as a clearinghouse and repository of information on the IT and recordkeeping practices of the agency.

Although agencies could probably continue to live in a world of paper recordkeeping practices absent e-discovery, e-discovery is and will most assuredly continue to be a driver of culture change. How many more litigation shocks to the system should the federal government take before agencies understand the value of better, more automated processes for the long-term maintenance of federal records, so as to ensure better transparency in the form of enhanced access? The world awaits our collective answer, and if none is forthcoming, parties certainly won’t be reticent about filing additional lawsuits demanding greater and more costly disclosures of the government’s electronic records. ■

Jason R. Baron is Director of Litigation at the National Archives and Records Administration. The statements expressed in this article are the author's personal views and do not purport to represent the positions taken by NARA or any other component of the federal government. For additional information contact Jason.baron@nara.gov.

AGA Opens the Doors of Government to the Citizens

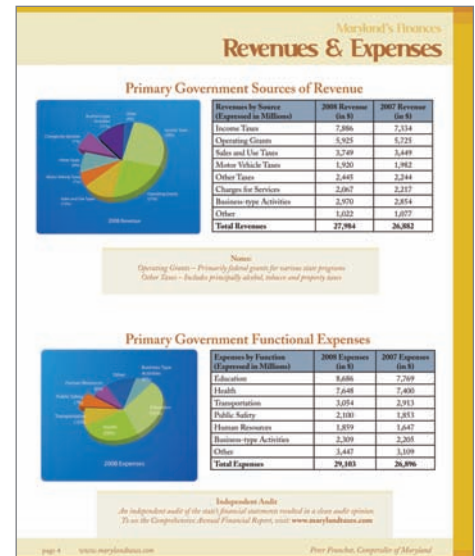
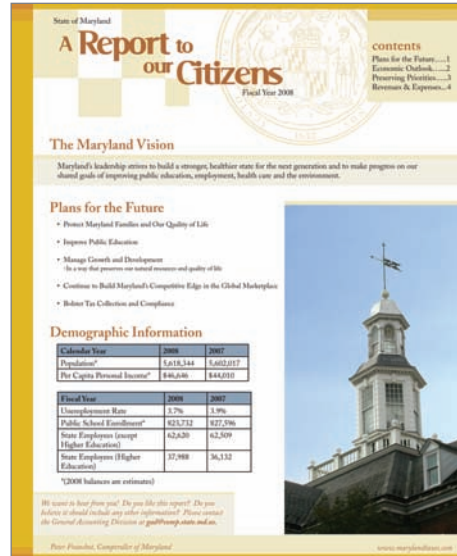
By Relmond Van Daniker, DBA, CPA
Executive Director
Association of Government Accountants

Ballooning budget deficits. Out of control spending. Higher taxes. Fewer services. Rightly or wrongly, citizens associate these issues with government finance at a time when governments at all levels face increasing challenges and tighter-than-ever budgets.

Last year, the Association of Government Accountants (AGA) commissioned a survey to determine whether citizens are satisfied with their governments. The objective of this first survey was to establish a baseline understanding of public attitudes, concerning transparency and accountability progress—or the lack of it—which could be tracked semi-annually. We were not surprised to learn they are deeply *dissatisfied* with the lack of information coming from their federal, state and local governments.

Of 1,652 citizens surveyed by Harris Interactive, 89 percent said that, as taxpayers, they are entitled to transparent financial management information, and 57 percent said that government has an obligation to provide it. They further indicated that government is failing to meet its financial management reporting needs, and that poor performance has created a problem of trust between residents and their governments. The survey showed that governments need innovative means of communication to overcome those challenges. In short, the survey uncovered a significant “expectations gap” between what the citizens want from their government and what they’re getting.

Even before we commissioned the



The State of Maryland's 4-page Citizen-Centric Report.

survey, AGA had responded to the dearth of information available to citizens by encouraging governments across the country to produce four-page Citizen-Centric Reports. The reports allow governments to produce a snapshot containing the information citizens want and need in an easily understood, visually appealing format.

The suggested format shows community information—such as population figures, regional characteristics and government goals for the community—on the first page, and the second page presents a performance report on key missions and service. The third page details cost and revenue information, and the

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fourth looks forward to the year ahead.

AGA believes that these reports will make governments more accountable to their citizens, and will help Americans become better educated and better able to participate in government activities.

The AGA Citizen-Centric Government Reporting Initiative is steadily expanding. The U.S. Departments of the Interior and Defense, as well as the U.S. Coast Guard, have produced reports at the federal level. Oregon, Nevada, Tennessee, South Carolina and Washington and cities and counties such as the District of Columbia, Saco, ME, Tallahassee, FL, Portland, OR, Bellevue, WA, and Blount County, TN, have produced Citizen-Centric Reports. Many others are in the works.

AGA now offers a free Certificate of Excellence in Citizen-Centric Reporting to recognize entities that prepare and distribute high-quality Citizen-Centric Reports. To be eligible for the certificate, governments must meet high standards of content, visual appeal, readability, distribution and timeliness in reporting as outlined below by our guidelines.

The following elements must be included in the report to be eligible for the Certificate of Excellence:

1. How the entity is organized/- operates (items such as vision statement and strategic goals)
2. Key accomplishments surrounding key missions and service and/or along with selected performance measures.

3. Bar and/or pie charts to display revenues and expenses.
4. Statements such as: An independent audit was conducted, resulting in a clean audit opinion. Complete financial information can be found at www.xyz.gov.
5. Future challenges affecting the entity.
6. Statements such as: We want to hear from you. Do you like this report? Do you believe it should include any other information? Please let us know by contacting xxx.
7. Report is 'free' of technical accounting language.
8. Report incorporates pictures and other graphics to make it visually appealing.
9. Report has been distributed (hard.c.opy, posted to website and/or posted in newspaper)
10. Report is issued in a timely manner following the close of the entity's fiscal year:
 - a. First-year report submitted to AGA: must be within six months
 - b. Second-year report submitted to AGA: must be within five months
 - c. Third-year report submitted to AGA: must be within four months
 - d. Fourth-year and beyond report submitted to AGA: must be within three months

Citizen-Centric Reports represent the future of government financial reporting. This program has become a

hallmark of AGA's effort to advance government accountability at all levels by making government more accessible to the people it serves—the taxpaying public.

In addition to this initiative, AGA offers a well-respected Certified Government Financial Manager designation, which recognizes the unique skills and experiences required to succeed in today's government finance environment. Also in keeping with our efforts to advance government accountability, we reward outstanding Performance and Accountability Reports (PARs) at the federal level, and Service Efforts and Accomplishments Reports produced by state and local governments.

AGA provides a wide array of training courses to help government finance professionals remain up-to-date and relevant as they provide the information decision-makers need each day. Without timely, reliable, efficient financial details, program managers can't succeed. Our members are on the front lines of the effort to ensure this information is readily available.

We're making strides in our effort to open the doors of government to the citizens. They pay the bills, so it's only fair that they know where the money goes, what they got for it and that it's being managed properly. That's why we also recommend that governments include information about their financial statement audits, which provide another layer of accountability. ■

For more information about AGA visit www.agacgfm.org.



India: Revolutionizing Land Records

World Bank

It is late in the morning as M. Ramaiah, 55, a farmer and father of three, stands straight and still, his eyes fixed on a computer screen in front of him. He waits patiently as the computer indicates that the printing process has begun. Shortly afterwards, he receives a neatly printed document. The piece of paper in his hands states that he owns a small plot of land near Ittamadu, a village located some 50 kilometers from Bangalore, the information technology capital of India.

In Bangalore, the huge growth of the information technology industry has attracted an influx of clients from around the world—multinational companies taking advantage of low wages, low maintenance costs, and state-of-the-art technology. But outside the city, in the rest of the state of Karnataka, it's a different story.

Agriculture still plays a vital role in the economy of this state, which has an area equal in size to the United Kingdom and a population twice that of Australia.

The contrast between rural Karnataka and technology-driven Bangalore couldn't be sharper. Could technology be the missing link, capable of bringing development to the villages and their millions of residents?

The answer is not completely clear. But what is sure is that technology, through as simple a means as computerized land ownership records, is providing these farmers with a measure of security and peace of mind they did not previously have.

A Vital Record

Agriculture accounts for about 28

percent of Karnataka's domestic product and remains the largest source of employment in the state. To increase farm incomes and empower local farmers, land ownership is essential. And land ownership, to be acknowledged, must be documented. Ironically enough, the most precious possession a poor illiterate farmer may have, next to his land, is the written land record that safeguards his rights as legal owner. Land records are vital documents for both farmers and the government, used to prove ownership and required for numerous administrative functions as well. Land records are needed three times a year to secure crop loans; they are also used for verification and for access to pensions and various other government programs.

These records form the basis for

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assignment and Putting land records online means easy access to vital information for settlement of land titles and must stand up under legal scrutiny. But for 200 years, the responsibility of maintaining land ownership records has been under the tight control of a powerful minority of village accountants.

Bhoomi

In the local language of Karnataka, bhoomi means land. Bhoomi is also the name given to a groundbreaking piece of software created to computerize 20 million land records in the state. The manual upkeep of land records before Bhoomi provided ample latitude for tampering, exploitation, and harassment from powerful vested interests. Those who suffered the most from this system were the small and marginal farmers who spent all of their meager resources fighting to keep their lands, bribing and cajoling village officials in order to obtain a record. Unfortunately, in all too many cases, these farmers would lose not just their land, but also their faith in the concept of justice.

Before Bhoomi, over 9,000 village accountants maintained 20 million records manually. The subdistrict offices, such as Ramanagaram's, rarely received any copies of the records that were manually updated on the fields. Thus, a virtual monopoly over these records evolved—along with a seemingly limitless opportunity for corruption and fraud, not to mention error and inefficiency.

Bhoomi has changed all that. Notes Deepa Narayan, a senior advisor for the World Bank, "It is telling that all of us could recall family conflicts over land records because of the high discretion" of land recording officials. With Bhoomi, 20 million land records for 6.7 million farmers in 177 subdistricts have been computerized in the state of Karnataka.

Records that used to take weeks, or even months, to obtain are now promptly available. For instance, it could take up to six months for a so-

called "mutation record," which is needed if a farmer wants to sell land or buy a plot of land elsewhere, to be delivered to the farmer. The mutation process is now completed in 45 days.

Besides these efficiency improvements, Bhoomi's important safeguard features, such as its biometric logon system, help ensure against fraud. The logon system is used to authenticate—through their fingerprints—the village accountants and other administrative personnel who access Bhoomi. Each village accountant must be fingerprinted in order to have access to the machine where the database is stored; this system also creates a record of who was the last person to access the deeds. The biometric logon system has thus virtually eliminated the opportunity for corruption and fraud.

Yesterday and Today

G. Venkatanaraiah, 40, a poor farmer from the small village of Gundhatherhalli, located about 14 kilometers from Ramanagaram, in rural Bangalore, owns a 2.5-acre plot of land. He came to the district office today to get a printout of his land record. G. Venkatanaraiah is a small man, with deep, dark eyes and an expressive smile. As he approaches the Bhoomi kiosk, a small group of villagers surround him, interested in seeing what the novelty is all about.

Thanks to the Bhoomi program, G. Venkatanaraiah is able to print his land record in less than five minutes. With this record, he hopes to get a loan to purchase fertilizers. The quality of his land is not very good, but he can still grow ragi—a grain similar in consistency to bulgur that is one of the staple foods of Karnataka—and the grain jowhar in enough quantities to feed him, his wife, and their two sons. The leftovers, together with some mangos from his plot, he will sell in Ramanagaram.

Before Bhoomi, G. Venkatanaraiah had to pursue village accountants for sometimes up to one week in order to get a land record. Moreover, he used to have to pay anywhere from 5 to 50

rupees to prove that he owned his small plot of land. "First, we had to search for the officials, and then wait for them to hear our pleas. Now, within a few minutes and by paying only 15 rupees, we are able to get our land deeds in no time."

Fair User Fee

G. Venkatanaraiah, like other Bhoomi users, doesn't begrudge the 15 rupees. That's because another successful feature of the computerized system has been its introduction of a standard user fee.

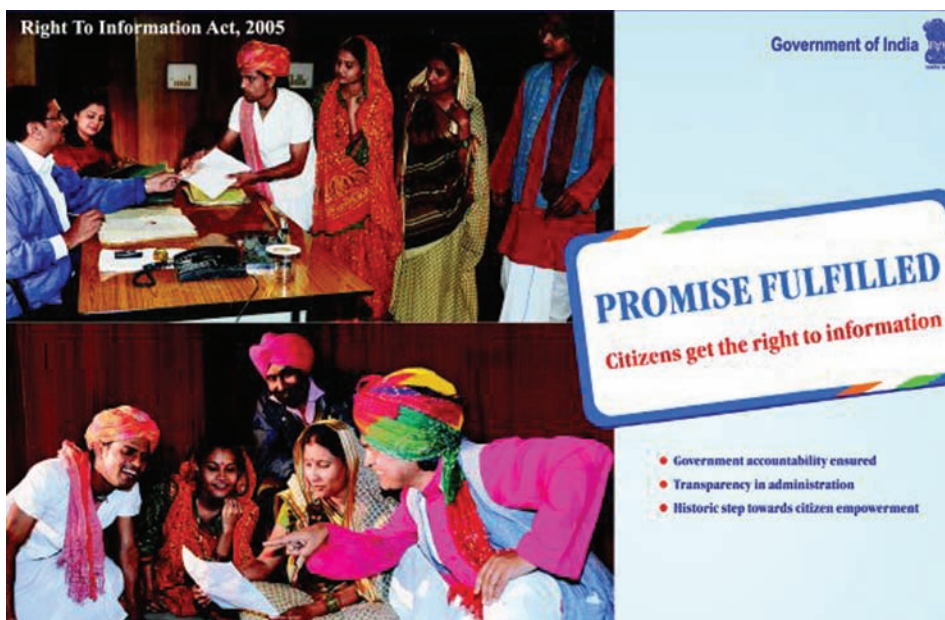
According to G. Satyavathi, deputy secretary for E-governance in Karnataka, farmers do not mind paying this fee because they are satisfied with the system. Before, the price for a land record was at the individual village accountant's discretion. Further, revenue collection from land records rarely made it back to the state coffers. With Bhoomi, on the other hand, farmers are pleased with the quality and consistency of the service, the government has increased its revenues, and the system's sustainability is ensured.

In the Ramanagaram district office, for instance, over 62,000 records have been issued since Bhoomi's introduction in 2001, and the state has collected over 960,000 rupees.

M. Ramaiah came to Ramanagaram today to get a printout of his land title in preparation for his son's upcoming marriage. Because of the marriage, he needs proof of land ownership. Also, he wants to know how much land he actually owns. He is concerned that, because of his son's marriage, there will be a split in the family and that his wife and daughters could lose their rights to the land.

Bhoomi's efficiency means he can focus on business rather than on logistics. "The system is easy, and I am very satisfied. Before, it would have taken me three to four days to locate the village accountant—and they always changed the price for the certificate. Now I pay 15 rupees every

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time." When asked if M. Ramiah receives a print out of his land the price was too steep, M. Ramaiah smiled and said no. He too had been a record. "Now they cannot take my land away," victim of village accountants' greed before.

Brain Child of a Civil Servant

It was Rajeev Chawla, a government civil servant working at the National Informatics Center in Bangalore, who recognized the need to find alternatives for land-record reform. The state government supported Chawla as he designed, and then put into action, a project to put all the local land records into a central computer.

The Bhoomi system soon followed. Completely designed in-house by the National Informatics Center, Bhoomi features touch screen kiosks, since

these do not require high literacy skills on the part of users seeking to access their records.

Lessons From a Model System

Today, 10 million computerized records are issued every year in Karnataka—an achievement other Indian states envy. Notes Sathayavathi, Karnataka's E-governance deputy, "Here is a successful project which has shown to the people and the citizens of this state that, yes, it should be scalable to other states—and why not to other countries? It's a good model, and it is delivering services. I think this is a revolution in land records."

With the computerization of land titles, the state is now able to take further steps toward keeping an online database and scrutinizing the

agricultural sector more closely. Many lessons are being learned through this new ability to analyze ownership trends. One of the things that Bhoomi was able to demonstrate in quantifiable terms was the huge disparity in land ownership between the men and women of Karnataka. According to the records, only 10 percent of the state's land belongs to female farmers.

Another lesson is that information technology can play a powerful role in poverty reduction, but that its use and potential have been largely overlooked. Technology that increases poor people's access to information whether of markets or services, and computerization that reduces the discretion of service providers, can be powerful tools for self-empowerment and poverty reduction.

It is about noon when M. Ramaiah leaves the Bhoomi kiosk in Ramanagaram. He folds the newly printed land record neatly and puts it in the front pocket of his shirt. "They will not take my land away now," he says, as he climbs on a small, rusting bike, which was leaning against the wall, and starts to ride back home. In the distance, he stops to catch his breath, and looks back. With a smile on his face, he waves. ■

For more information about this and other Development 360 stories, please contact Ana Luna Barros atalunabarros@worldbank.org.



Fighting Corruption, While Building Energy Security

By Kathryn Joyce
Revenue Watch Institute

In the Niger Delta of West Africa, the poorest communities live atop oil and gas deposits that have generated over \$600 billion in oil revenues over the past five decades. Though Nigeria's resource wealth could spearhead development across the region—roads, schools, hospitals, and modernized technological infrastructure. For most Nigerians quality of life has not improved but deteriorated. In the Niger Delta in particular, the population faces new diseases, rampant pollution that undercuts traditional livelihoods such as fishing, and endemic corruption that has helped engender a violent insurgency. Poverty prevails, with 90 percent of the population surviving on

less than two dollars per day as they live and work next to the oil pipelines that carry vast wealth through their villages.

This paradox of poverty amidst plenty is often referred to as the “resource curse”—the too-common dilemma of resource-rich countries that remain underdeveloped, impoverished, and plagued by corrupt and conflict, despite the extractive resource wealth that could vastly improve their standard of living.

Angola, projected to become one of the highest-earning oil producing countries in Africa over the next several decades, has long been a poster country for the resource curse, due to its notoriously

opaque government, and the role oil and diamond revenues played in funding the country's destructive 27-year civil war. In recent years, the Angolan government has begun to take some important steps to introduce revenue and expenditure transparency into the public management of its petroleum and mineral wealth, including new elections and the publication of budgets. However, the reforms have been incomplete, and Angola's scores on both corruption and human development indicators are some of the lowest in the world.

The culprit is often vast amounts of money changing hands outside of the public eye. The key to transforming development, wealth and stability in resource rich countries is making transparency and accountability the shared concern of all parties engaged in the extractive industries: governments, companies and civil society alike.

Many Americans may be aware of the disparity between the potential and reality of development in resource rich countries, but fewer understand the

role that the United States can play in promoting transparency worldwide—and why it is fitting that the U.S., one of the world's leading resource consumers and the destination of 20 percent of Nigerian oil alone, should take a leading role in this promotion.

In the last Congress, a bill was introduced in the U.S. House that would bolster transparency and accountability in the oil, gas, and mining industries dramatically. The Extractive Industries Transparency Disclosure (EITD) Act sponsored by Chairman Barney Frank of the Financial Services Committee mandates that all domestic and foreign companies registered with the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) report their payments to governments for any extractive industry activity.

Sarah Pray of the Publish What You Pay U.S. coalition, part of an international coalition on the forefront of the transparency movement, compares today's EITD act to an older example of the U.S. taking on corruption. In the 1970s, the Foreign Corrupt Practices Act (FCPA) brought sweeping reform of corrupt activities by American companies operating abroad, taking on a culture of corruption so pervasive that some countries allowed tax deductions for bribes. Then, says Pray, the United States took the lead then because it was the right thing to do. Today, Publish What You Pay is leading the call for the EITD Act, along with the Revenue Watch Institute and many other coalition members. Pray says that new transparency in extractives revenues around the world will have the same long-term benefits as the FCPA has had, by helping to make sure that corrupt governments do not withhold or mismanage extractive revenues that could help build and sustain their countries.

Just as the U.S. positively wielded its economic influence in 1977 to begin to change business practices around the world, today it is in a position to drive the transparency agenda in the global oil and mining sectors, by requiring those companies under the jurisdiction of the SEC from these sectors to

behave with greater transparency wherever they operate.

The global transparency movement has been growing for some years, particularly since the introduction in 2002 of the voluntary Extractive Industry Transparency Initiative (EITI), which standardizes a process for governments to measure and improve their disclosure practices for revenues from extractive companies. The broad support this initiative enjoys from companies, the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, as well as resource rich exporting countries, signals that increasing transparency is not just a concern for low-income countries.

The movement is beginning to take off in the United States as well. Senator Richard Lugar, ranking member of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee and a co-sponsor of the EITD Act, released a report on the resource curse in October 2008 entitled "The Petroleum and Poverty Paradox: Assessing U.S. and International Community Efforts to Fight the Resource Curse." The report calls for the U.S. to join the EITI and submit the Interior Department's royalty collection to outside audit; to assist resource-rich countries in managing their new revenues; and to "back their transparency words with deeds," by requiring that extractive companies publish their payments country-by-country, as the EITD Act requires.

Sarah Pray concurs with this "practice what you preach" message. "If we're encouraging other countries to implement the EITI, we should have a law on our books, and also implement EITI ourselves." Not only would this boost U.S. credibility in its own calls for transparency around the world, and in countries whose stability is linked to U.S. interests, but it would also be a boon in countries where more transparent behavior by U.S. companies would improve U.S. diplomatic efforts and reputation. "These companies are our ambassadors abroad. How they do business reflects on the U.S." The bill would cover 90 percent of the top 50

internationally operating oil companies, including most major non-US companies, reducing the risk that more transparent American companies would be put at a competitive disadvantage by their compliance. As one of the largest consumers of other countries' extractive resources, the U.S. is invariably affected by the business standards of oil-producing countries. "Like it or not, we have a role to play."

A growing number of members of Congress appear to share this attitude. Since its introduction in 2008, the EITD Act picked up 42 sponsors in the House and Senate, following the determined work of Publish What You Pay, Revenue Watch, Global Witness, Oxfam America and many other coalition members. The Senate version of the bill was sponsored by New York Senator Charles Schumer.

In September, Revenue Watch board members, partners and authors testified in support of the bill at two Senate hearings. "When major oil producing countries are hobbled by an unstable business environment, the U.S. economy and our energy security suffer," Revenue Watch Director Karen Lissakers testified. "Information is the lifeblood of healthy markets and of healthy political systems, and the EITD Act will contribute to both."

With the findings of the Lugar report and a new incoming administration, Revenue Watch and the Publish What You Pay coalition are optimistic about the passage of the EITD Act in 2009. We will continue to promote the standards of transparency and accountability that the bill represents. ■

The Revenue Watch Institute (www.revenuewatch.org) is a non-profit policy institute and grantmaking organization that promotes the responsible management of oil, gas and mineral resources for the public good.

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Through a Glass, Darkly

What do we mean by transparency in government?

By Matthew Dunlap
Secretary of State
State of Maine

In 1973, America was shocked by revelations first published in the pages of the *Washington Post* that the President of the United States had been implicated in activities meant to consolidate power and undermine any political opposition. Earlier in our nation's history, President Warren G. Harding's administration was rocked by dark allegations surrounding oil leases and corruption that became known as the Teapot Dome scandal. Most recently, allegations of Illinois Governor Rod Blagojevich trying to "sell" President Obama's vacant Senate seat led to the governor's removal from office.

Big and small, reports of instances of wrongdoing, waste, and favoritism abound through history and contemporary news reports. The public demands transparency and accountability in government—but what does that mean? And how do we achieve it?

While corruption is easy to define and root out, "waste" is not. One observer's waste may be another's vital effort; the politics of prioritization make such discussions circular. But public trust that the best *available* solutions are arrived at should be more empirically quantifiable. How to make information available and usable is just one challenge.

In October 2008, the National Electronic Commerce Coordinating Council (eC3) hosted a symposium in Washington, D.C.. The purpose of the symposium was to give better shape to the buzzword "*transparency*." What does it and what should it mean to public officials? And how can it be an effective tool for the public?

The good news is that technology and telecommunications make it easier than ever for the public to extract information about budgets, programs and the people who administer them. Nonetheless, statutory provisions that anchor the public's access to government activities remain mired in standards from a different time. For example, most public-notice laws were written in times when not every town even had ready access to newspapers, so that posting of notices of government meetings and warrants for government action were only required to be posted in "conspicuous places," probably the front door of the local church or town hall. Today, many states require posting notices of legislative hearings and agency rulemaking proposals in newspaper legal notice sections which rarely attract much public attention. Such requirements—and the political adherence to them—represent an anachronistic resignation of public ennui to governmental proceedings, and the political advantages that offers bureaucrats.

(To keep this in the proper context, this was common in New England in colonial times, and many of these requirements are still on the books. When the author was the chair of the local city party committee, he was required—by law—to post the notice of the party caucus on the town bulletin board as well as in the local newspaper two weeks in advance of the caucus. If he wanted anyone to attend, however, he had to call people.)

The public, policy advocates, and lawmakers who seek to modernize public participation and the transparency that is required to inform

the public and make their participation meaningful are left with a number of disadvantages.

For the policymaker, one key question is what exactly it is the public is interested in. While modern notices and availability of financial information, campaign finance disclosures, budget documents, reports from watchdogs, and other information is readily available, for the public accessing such information it's all very much like drinking from a fire hose.

Secondly, there is the element of the public that inherently distrusts any government information, from any source—or worse, that element of society that simply doesn't care. Nonetheless, those citizens deserve accountability too, and whether they come to trust the process or the product will largely hinge on how usable and verifiable information they receive is.

Finally, once the information is aggregated and made available, someone has to use it. For policymakers this may be more intuitive, but is no more common than the utilization of information about programs and budgets by the general public. Thus policymakers rely on "common sense" and "life experience" instead of historical data, bringing the whole matter around full circle.

Tricky, too, is context. Raw data on salaries of public officials, for example, is often tasty fodder for bloggers and watchdogs, but such spreadsheets almost never include even a summary sentence of what those officials are responsible for, or

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what would be comparable in the private sector. But contextualizing information is also controlling it, and many public officials are reluctant to editorialize or justify their actions to a wary public, seeking instead to avoid a fight.

But the public also has a responsibility, too, and there's the political hair trigger. When the public is outraged, there's little room for civics lessons, especially coming from government officials. If government officials and agencies establish collaborative relationships with watchdog groups and respond readily to requests for information, problems can usually be quickly avoided. After all, people just want honest answers to their questions.

Attaining such answers is now available in more vectors than at any time in history. With blogs, online chatrooms, wikis, and electronic forums, policymakers and the public

have greater opportunity than ever to share information. Many websites are now dedicated to examining not only programs, but what is said about them, and monitor for disparate facts and truthful statements. Of course, the old-fashioned public forum where policymakers and administrators answer questions and present information in person still has a significant place in the realm of transparent government. Any method for encouraging public participation is going to be hard work, but anyone who does it will testify to its effectiveness.

Perhaps the most perplexing aspect of transparent government is the total lack of reward. People expect that their officials are doing the right thing and are behaving transparently, and thus offer no acknowledgement of best practices or for good behavior. In a way, it's not transparency at all people want; it's assurance. Assurance that someone is manning

the watchtower, that all the safeguards against arrogance and corruption work. But they don't. This is the unsolvable problem of transparency: it doesn't guarantee accountability—only vigilance does that. There is no ready substitute for an engaged public, or method in law that assures that elected officials and the bureaucrats who report to them will behave in the public's best interest.

Can you trust me? I ask people that all the time. They always say yes. I'm sure they're sincere. But I follow up with this question: if you can really trust me, then why do we need to hold an election every two years? ■

Matt Dunlap is Secretary of State for the State of Maine and Chairman of the National Electronic-Commerce Coordinating Council.

Transparency in Government Begins Outside

By John Wonderlich
Program Director
Sunlight Foundation

One of President Obama's first official acts in office was to issue sweeping new information policies. His directives, which single out transparency, participation, and collaboration, have the potential to generate a new era of networked governance, where digital tools empower citizens and government employees to more fully participate in democratic processes.

These directives, however, if implemented improperly, may be just as likely to create new turf battles, unwieldy mandates, uncertainty, or unnecessary layers of bureaucracy.

As government employees craft and then follow the new technology and information policies of the Obama administration, the examples set by experiments in data and engagement will be among the government innovators' best new guides.

To be sure, significant coordination and guidance already come from government agencies and organizations, from top-level authorities to the insider-champions working for technological reform. Government's coordinative role should only continue to grow as the new administration's commitment becomes explicit. There's

a limit, however, to the sort of technology and policy innovation that government can produce. Regulations that sometimes hold government back don't apply in the same way to non-profits, educational institutions, and businesses, who are learning to catalyze government innovation from without.

I am the Policy Director for just such an organization. The Sunlight Foundation, a Washington, D.C.-based nonprofit, was founded in 2006 with transparency in government as its central mission. As technology's transformative potential has always been at the heart of our vision for an open government, our foundation invests heavily in the technology of public understanding, building tools that help citizens and government employees alike comprehend and interact with government.

Much of our work has been created with an appreciation for the money and influence at the heart of our political system. Sunlight provides significant

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support for the Center for Responsive Politics, whose OpenSecrets.org website provides an unparalleled view of money in politics. Designing with open access and data architecture in mind, many sites like OpenSecrets.org now feature APIs, or Application Programming Interfaces, which allow other sites to repurpose the underlying data. In this way, for example, the Center's campaign finance data (a cleaned-up version of Federal Election Commission data) has been integrated into other sites, like Congresspedia or MAPLight.org.

Congresspedia is a citizen's wiki on Congress, featuring comprehensive details on all things congressional, and now featuring campaign finance data generated from the Center's databases. In a similar reuse of data, MAPLight.org combines campaign contributions with vote tallies, uncovering suggestive patterns, where spikes in political giving often precede important legislation by only a few days.

The impact of nonprofit innovation can be seen even more clearly through the example of FedSpending.org. With support from a Sunlight grant, OMB Watch created the FedSpending.org website, offering searchable access to all federal grants and contracts. The example set by OMB Watch was so strong that it helped lead to the

passage of the Federal Funding Accountability and Transparency Act (often referred to in a recent political campaign as Coburn-Obama). That legislation created USASpending.gov, made in the precise image of FedSpending.org. Even FedSpending.org's carefully crafted API carried over to the federal site, a clear example of the federal government following the example of a non-government organization.

Legislative information is being similarly reprocessed from outside Congress. Legislative documents follow a complex path to most citizens' computer screens. After being drafted, they go to closed congressional databases, then the Library of Congress to be posted publicly, and then to GovTrack.us, the primary public hub for legislative data. GovTrack.us was created by its sole proprietor, University of Pennsylvania student Josh Tauberer, to produce more user-friendly legislative information. Many other sites, including OpenCongress.org, reuse GovTrack's data to present a fuller view of Congress. OpenCongress.org, another Sunlight grantee, has created a rich social layer on top of congressional information, allowing users to track, share, and comment on bills online, adding rich explanatory content to the usually inscrutable information.

Each of these projects affects not only the users who employ them, but also the government employees who were the original stewards of the data. This feedback loop is essential to the role that outside actors have in helping government live up to its digital potential: while federal information policy can be hard to affect from the outside, the individuals who are most intimately familiar with any system are often the biggest champions for its reform. In this way, just as Sunlight's work has set a powerful standard for how government should approach its technology, we also hope to empower the mechanics of digital democracy: new-media staffers, Webmasters, CIOs, systems administrators, and even the occasional member of Congress or agency head.

The better America's visions of accountability, transparency, and interactivity are connected to the policy-makers, journalists, and the democracy practitioners, the better Obama's vision of openness can be realized. ■

John Wonderlich is the Program Director for the Sunlight Foundation, a D.C. based non-partisan, non-profit transparency advocacy organization. For additional information, contact johnwonderlich@gmail.com or at 202/742-1520.





Beyond Transparency in Government

By Jennifer L. Dorn
President and CEO
National Academy of Public Administration

As Supreme Court Justice Potter Stewart said of pornography, most of us know government transparency when we see it: timely, accurate, and reliable information made available to the public. And we understand why transparency is important: it is the basis for accountability and guards against the three bureaucratic evils of waste, fraud and abuse.

Increasingly, however, government leaders recognize that solving the complex problems facing America today will require more than simply keeping citizens informed. Meeting challenges like rising health care costs, climate change and energy independence will require a level of

collaboration that we have never seen before. Traditionally, government agencies have operated in silos – separated not only from citizens, but from each other, as well. Nevertheless, some have begun to reach across and outside of government to access the collective brainpower of organizations, stakeholders and individuals.

On his first full day in office, President Obama put government on notice that this new, more collaborative model can no longer be confined to the efforts of early adopters. He called upon every executive department and agency to “harness new technology” and make government “transparent,

participatory, and collaborative.” And now, the real work begins.

A Good Start

Hitting the President's trifecta of good government may be easier said than done – but it won't be because technology is standing in the way.

A little more than a year ago, the National Academy of Public Administration launched the Collaboration Project. This independent consortium of government leaders comes together on-line (www.collaborationproject.org) and in-person to share ideas, examples and insights about leveraging web 2.0 and collaborative

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technology to solve government's complex problems.

In addition, as part of the Collaboration Project, the National Academy has collected, posted and begun to analyze more than 50 examples of innovative uses of collaborative technology in federal, state and local government. These case studies range from powerful mashups of satellite imagery and government databases, to relatively simple forays on popular social networking sites.

The Alabama Department of Homeland Security, for example, convinced local government and non-governmental stakeholders throughout the state to overlay data that they "owned" on a comprehensive online database of satellite imagery. The resulting application, known as Virtual Alabama, is a visualization tool that uses an enterprise version of Google Earth, customized to show the state's most critical data overlaid on maps. With the click of a mouse, first responders and emergency response planners can use Virtual Alabama to view three-dimensional models of schools, bridges and critical infrastructure, overlaid on satellite imagery and showing the locations of fire hydrants, gas pipelines, hazardous chemicals, and other critical information.

At the other end of the spectrum, the U.S. Library of Congress has tapped into the "wisdom of the crowd" through a publicly available photo-sharing website, posting thousands of photos and inviting the public to provide information, tags and descriptions. While extending the reach of its collection to millions across the nation and around the globe, the Library has also been able to significantly enrich its photo collection without undertaking costly and time-consuming staff research. It now loads an additional 50 photos each Friday and averages about half a million views each month.

What's Stopping Us Now?

There are two fundamental challenges that stand in the path of rapid progress toward collaborative government: culture and policy.

The President's call for a new era of transparency and collaboration will, without question, begin to break down the cultural barriers inside government that have impeded progress. As desirable as it may sound, our expectation that government agencies should act as stewards over the use and dissemination of the data they collect often stands in the way of transparency and collaboration.

Changing this "ownership and control" culture in government will not be a small task, especially as we reaffirm our commitment to accountability. Government agencies must provide information in a format that allows people to engage with data, make their own discoveries, and tell others what they have learned. "Transparency" can no longer mean simply publishing information in a static format. Key to making progress, however, will be a common understanding of when and what data must be protected by government, and what data should be considered a national asset, free to be mined by anyone for any reason.

A related but potentially more daunting obstacle is the vast number of laws and official policies that restrict government's ability to take full advantage of new technologies and opportunities for collaboration. Working with Collaboration Project members, Fellows and staff of the National Academy have begun to document the myriad official "obstacles" that stand in the way. To be fair, most were enacted or adopted long before the era of web 2.0 and could not anticipate its potential use in the work of government. They are, nonetheless, real and numerous.

For example, the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) did not anticipate the emergence of iterative

media, where documents evolve collaboratively online. How many versions of a single page of a government wiki must be preserved for potential FOIA disclosure? Similarly, when and how must instant message (IM) exchanges be preserved and be subject to FOIA or other record-keeping and disclosure requirements? It has been reported that the Obama White House has barred the use of IM, because attorneys believe the Presidential Records Act would apply, requiring preservation and public disclosure five years after the president leaves office.

Another layer of complexity is added when government agencies, like the Library of Congress, want to create a presence on free third party sites like Flickr, YouTube and Second Life. Can federal agencies simply sign up, or is this transaction subject to federal procurement regulations? Can they "click the box" and agree to terms and conditions that bind them to state law, despite the Supremacy Clause in the U.S. Constitution?

The Promise of Generational Change

Having entered government in the wake of Watergate, my generation of public servants strongly believed and still believes that government should work for the people. But we didn't really understand that we also needed to work with the people.

Today, government is quickly transitioning to a new generation of managers and leaders, for whom online collaboration is not a new frontier but a fact of everyday life. We owe it to them—and the citizens we serve—to recognize and embrace transparency, participation and collaboration as essential to good government in the 21st Century. ■

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Get Ready for Wiki-Government

By Morley Winograd and Michael D. Hais

President Barack Obama's remarkable showing among millennials (voters 18-26 years old), who supported him by a more than 2:1 margin, was a direct byproduct of his groundbreaking effort to utilize online communication tools to mobilize those core supporters. Now the Obama administration has an opportunity to utilize similarly sophisticated Web 2.0 technologies to make America's governing processes more transparent, thereby increasing the trust of all generations in the federal government.

The beliefs and behaviors of the millennial generation will

fundamentally reshape how government policy is made and how it is administered. Millennials constantly interact with each other using social networks. They tend to make decisions based on consensus, with leadership focused on forming and shaping that consensus. Since they have learned to search for the answer to every question on the Internet, they tend not to believe in the authority of a few elite experts. Instead, they place their faith in the wisdom that comes from the combined opinions of all their friends, or, by extension, the members of a network. These characteristics of America's newest "civic" generation will shift the debate of the last decade

on how best to "reinvent government" to a debate on how to *invent* new ways of exercising our democratic governance ideals.

Given millennials' values and behaviors and the technologies they love, the thrust of efforts by the Obama administration to reshape governance in the United States will involve the creation of open structures attempting to maximize the number who participate in policy-making. Dispersed participatory structures, such as Google or Wikipedia, are brands millennials think of when asked to name information sources they trust. It is from these models that

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millennials will draw their inspiration for reshaping America's governing processes.

While Wikipedia's open structure, complete transparency and user participation has made it a favorite site for millennials, many more traditional opinion-makers abhor the notion of "decision-making by crowds" that the site represents. But the rapid evolution of online politics engineered by the Obama campaign provides an inherent antidote to the problem of unfettered aggregation and lowest-common-denominator outcomes

legislator Steve Urquhart as a place "where Utahans could debate issues coming before the legislature." It was used to influence the policy decisions in that state's 2007 legislative session. Technologically, Politicopia operated in a very "millennialist" manner, being "based on a user-controlled wiki system that allows anyone to join the discussion. Unlike activist groups such as MoveOn.org, it does not push an agenda other than open discussion."

Andrew Rasiej, founder of the Personal Democracy Forum and a strong advocate for more openness in

Despite its "bleeding edge" character, *Politicopia.com* was warmly received by the legislature. "It moved the needle...it helped improve the dialogue. I think that's what a lot of us are yearning for in politics these days," is how founder Urquhart summed up the experience. His legislative colleague, Steve Sandstrom, agreed. "I think we're on the verge of something new...it was intelligent, thoughtful and produced a consensus. It was pretty neat." The result put Utah "at the vanguard of the future of American politics in the twenty-first century,"

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mentioned by many critics of Wikipedia. As one of the more famous critics, Jaron Lanier, who coined the term "virtual reality" in the 1980s, said, "The ecology of social media is balanced by the presence of other applications such as blogs and social networking where individuality and cooperation are alive and well.... By using a mix of social media, communities can benefit both from the wisdom of crowds and the wisdom of individuals." By celebrating the use of blogs and social networks in his administration as much as he did in the campaign, President Obama can ensure the success of a wiki-government approach to governance.

The first steps in the use of technology to enable increased citizen involvement in policy-making, while preserving the constitutional role of representative legislative bodies, were taken in the conservative, but tech-savvy, state of Utah almost two years ago. *Politicopia.com*, a "virtual town square" was founded by Utah state

government, points out an important difference between chat rooms and political wikis. "Politicopia is more of a repository of ideas and discussions where issues can be debated and information can be added over time." Voters leave behind "both a record and an aggregation of voices to define an issue." Urquhart underlined the key to the site's success: "It only works if it's a broad pool of people, not just techies or one party or another.... It has to be bottom up. The people have to have the tools and ability to set the agenda."

The political impact of the site did not break down along traditional conservative/liberal lines. The online debate moved the chamber in a conservative direction when it convinced several key legislators to vote for the adoption of a school voucher program that passed by only one vote. But it also pushed the legislature toward a liberal decision by rejecting a proposal to have Utah directly challenge the Roe v. Wade abortion ruling.

according to Rasiej, "where town halls, policy debates and civic involvement will happen on wikis, blogs, video-sharing and social networking sites." Given the technological sophistication of the Obama administration and its desire to inject a greater degree of innovation in the government's fundamental processes, the spread of wiki-government from this state legislative pilot to the federal executive branch is inevitable.

Having become engaged in unprecedented numbers in his election, Americans, especially millennials, want to continue to participate in President Obama's administration. Wiki-government is the perfect vehicle to satisfy that desire. ■

Morley Winograd and Michael D. Hais are co-authors of Millennial Makeover: MySpace, YouTube, and the Future of American Politics. Winograd was Director of the National Partnership for Reinventing Government from 1997-2001.



Building the Digital Public Square

By Vivek Kundra
United States Chief Information Officer

In ancient Athens—the model for the democracy envisioned by the framers of our Constitution -- citizens met, face to face, in the agora—the public square—to conduct business, debate civic issues, and drive the decisions of government. Gone are the days of daily meetings at the agora. Today, citizens know government as red tape, long lines, and cold, distant bureaucracies. The reins of government have slipped from “we the people” to inaccessible government officials.

The District of Columbia, however, is at the forefront of a new era of governance, one in which

technological advances now allow people from around the world unfettered access to their government. Through these advances, constituents can hold their government accountable from the privacy of their own homes. The District of Columbia is bringing people closer to government through collaborative technologies like wikis, data feeds, videos and dashboards. We’re throwing open D.C.’s warehouse of public data so that everyone—constituents, policymakers, and businesses—can meet in a new digital public square.

The District maintains vast stores of

data on every aspect of government operations, from government contracts to crime statistics to economic development. We have organized these data into convenient catalogs and live data feeds and made them available to the general public at <http://data.octo.d.c..gov>. Visitors to the site can find information on crime incidents by date, time of day, ward, block, or method; details on construction projects by location, type of construction, budget, completion date or status; data on registered vacant properties by ward, address, owner or tax assessment; or information on

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businesses, such as the locations of District establishments that hold liquor licenses. Mapping technology also allows users to view data geographically with a single click. Using an ordinary Web browser, anyone in the world can access this information.

When we first opened the doors to government data, people were quick to respond. Individuals and organizations are not only viewing our government data, but are actually improving upon our work by analyzing

requests, community meetings, and more. A private entrepreneur has assembled law enforcement data from the District and across the country into an online database, called "CrimeReports." Visitors can get crime data and maps by address, zip code, and type of crime and sign up for personalized crime alerts.

These are truly grassroots ventures. The democratization of government data has revealed an enormous appetite for civic participation. We are ushering in a new age of participatory

Facebook alone, founded just four years ago, now has over 60 million active users, and YouTube, a year younger, hosted 3 billion video views in a single month this year. We responded to these new communications trends by expanding D.C. Government's presence on Facebook and posting job listings and bid solicitations on YouTube under the "D.C. Government" channel. Leveraging consumer technology in this way allows us to reach wider audiences at no cost to taxpayers.

The digital public square is now at the heart of our efforts to make government services more effective, accessible, and transparent. By ensuring that every citizen has a front row seat in the digital public square, we'll continue to return government into the hands of "we, the people."

and repurposing the information in useful ways. One innovative D.C. resident took it upon herself to gather publicly-available government data on service requests, crimes, and building and public space permits to create a Web-based informational clearinghouse site that informs southeastern D.C. residents about local real estate development and the quality of government services. With a \$1.1 million grant from the Knight Foundation, a group of veteran Web journalists has transformed local government data into an online community news forum at Everyblock.com for the District and for 10 other U.S. cities. Here, visitors can plug in their zip code and find and exchange information about everything of interest in their neighborhoods—local businesses and reviews, real estate listings, crimes, road construction, city service

democracy, one in which citizens are in the driver's seat when they interact with government. Accessibility has never been greater, and this is just the beginning. In the past year, the District of Columbia published over 200 data feeds. During the coming year, we expect to double that.

Today, building the digital public square is not just appealing, it is imperative for every government, whether municipal, state, or national. We live in the information age. Nearly 1.5 billion people have access to the Internet—and they are using it in every way. There is a worldwide digital market for goods and services. For example, Amazon.com, founded just over a decade ago, now handles about 56 million transactions a year, and Ebay, founded at about the same time, now has over 275 million registered users. There is a growing number of global social and artistic networks.

Until now, government has largely been absent in the trend towards worldwide exchange of information and services. Starting here in the District, we hope to demonstrate that government, too, can and must step fully into the digital arena. That is why the digital public square is now at the heart of our efforts to make government services more effective, accessible, and transparent. By ensuring that every citizen has a front row seat in the digital public square, we'll continue to return government into the hands of "we, the people." ■

Vivek Kundra is the former Chief Technology Officer for the District of Columbia. He has been appointed the nation's first Chief Information Officer. For additional information contact Rosalyn.McKine@dc.gov.

Open Government Serves Citizens

By Maryantonett Flumian
Ottawa University

The confluence of technology, demographic, social and economic forces is about to force huge change in the way government does business. The new function-rich infrastructure of Web 2.0, the emergence of social media and the desire for greater participation on the part of citizens is fundamentally redesigning how government operates, what public services are provided and by whom, and how governments interact and engage their citizens.

Traditionally, governments design services and roll them out to citizens who are expected to comply with the

outcomes. Information fuels collaboration on the way to achieving a goal.

The “citizen-collaborator” becomes an active consumer or “prosumer” of policy, programs and service, identifying needs and helping to shape their fulfillment. The technology and tools become a means of finding better ways to integrate and balance the individual's preferences with his or her community's needs and resources. Prosumerism dramatically improves the responsiveness of public systems and keeps everyone involved—from officials, to stakeholders to citizens—

is to use Web 2.0's tools to answer more creatively the question of “who does what”. Public services no longer need to be provided by government alone; any combination of public agencies, the private sector, a community group, or citizens can provide them, using the Web to collaborate, innovate and engage.

What follows are a few ideas for getting started on the journey towards open government.

Unleash data. A growing chorus of observers (both inside and outside government) believe government's first

Public services no longer need to be provided by government alone; any combination of public agencies, the private sector, a community group, or citizens can provide them, using the Web to collaborate, innovate and engage.

terms and conditions of policy and programs. Typically, the service is the same for everyone. It is always linear. Outputs are the metrics for the model: how many cheques got in the mail, how many people got back to work, how many calls got answered. Compliance with the design's rules and regulations is paramount, especially in transactional services.

The new model is not a mass-production machine. Instead, in a more holistic fashion, policy and service are directly connected to outcomes. Enabled by powerful information systems and ongoing interactions that help build a profound understanding of needs, providers and users collaborate in creating services together. They use the “information ecosystem” created by Web 2.0 technologies to re-calibrate the relationship between providers and users and the evidence of

focused on setting and achieving goals together.

This model is highly collaborative and demonstrates the changing role of government and the changing responsibilities of citizens. It also understands that collaborative partnerships can include members outside of governmental boundaries. Organizational structure continues to exist but barely matters in the achievement of outcomes. All the necessary information, talent, and knowledge are simply there, with a few keywords and a click on “search”.

While Government 2.0 is still in its infancy, and while there are still concrete innovations to draw on, a number of Web 2.0 concepts popularized in other sectors can help form a hypothesis on how they might work. Perhaps the greatest opportunity

priority in a Web 2.0 world should be to make its data available on the Net in ways that are open, standards-compliant, and re-usable by third parties—whether they're individual citizens or commercial or non-profit organizations. The assumption is that third parties, less constrained by rigid internal bureaucracies and strict accountabilities, will innovate around the data far more quickly and freely than government can. Both government and non-government entities stand to benefit as a combination of Web 2.0 technologies (including XML, RSS feeds, and data visualization tools) makes government data available in attractive, bold graphic forms that anyone can understand and debate. Agencies can employ these technologies internally, to improve interagency cooperation, reduce redundant activities, identify

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potential synergies between programs, empower larger portions of their workforces, and reduce operating costs. Having learned how to alter policy-making and evaluation processes based on these new sources of information and insight, they can then invite the public to use the tools, with comparable benefits. "Emergent behavior" can lead to new insights, innovations and strategies that even the smartest individuals couldn't produce in isolation.

Embrace open standards and Web services. Leading governments are emulating their private sector counterparts and embracing the new standards, capabilities and architectures of Web services. Most important, there's a change in mindset from thinking about enterprise applications only, to building an Enterprise Service Architecture (ESA) founded on Web services, the new paradigm in software. Here, a single service platform enables and drives all applications so that internal or external users can access important services regardless of channel. Web services and an ESA reduce integration costs and dramatically speed application development, creating much more open, powerful and adaptable IT environments. With an Enterprise Service Architecture, governments have Net-based, standards-oriented, flexible software environments that can encompass information in structured and unstructured form, as well as in multivendor systems. This, in turn, provides the foundation for delivering high-quality services--such as education, health, and security--as an integrated ecosystem of providers (perhaps blending public and private services), not as a collection of hundreds of departments with incompatible systems.

Create an Ideastorm. Governments can harness the power of presumption by asking customers how to improve service quality. Dell Computer's IdeaStorm provides a useful template for government agencies. Launched in 2007, IdeaStorm

(www.dellideastorm.com) looks and feels a lot like Digg.com, the popular technology news aggregator. Users post suggestions and the community votes; the most popular ideas rise to the top. The user-driven idea-filtering process eases the burden on company resources by harnessing "the crowd" to sift through mountains of feedback. Less than a week after IdeaStorm's launch, users had contributed over 1,300 ideas that were voted on more than 120,000 times. Dell has already translated many of the ideas contributed by Dell customers into product and service innovations.

Leverage new channels for feedback. New Web-based tools that improve the ability of organizations to gather and analyze feedback from their customers are emerging to support continuous innovation and improvement. In many cases, third parties in the non-profit sector are running excellent customer feedback sites, suggesting that in some cases governments could readily tap into existing online communities rather than build their own. Initiatives such as www.fixmystreet.org in the U.K. enable residents to submit concerns about safety, vandalism or other local issues directly to their municipal council. The site features a tracking mechanism that indicates whether local concerns (such as a pothole-riddled road) have been addressed by the relevant authorities. Using the site, British residents play a more active role in increasing public welfare, while helping local government officials identify issues in their jurisdiction. In the health care arena, the independent UK-based www.patientopinion.org allows patients to rate different hospitals and provide feedback on their experiences.

Open a virtual service desk. The number of citizens participating in virtual worlds such as Second Life may be low, but it is not too early to experiment with virtual service desks in the medium. A number of agencies have already done so, citing the relatively low costs, the ability to reach young people and the desire to prove

that governments are keeping pace with innovative uses of technology. The official tourism foundation of Tuscany, is one of the first public-sector organizations to exploit Second Life as a medium for tourism-related marketing and services. Its Toscana Island lets Second Life visitors tour the Tower of Pisa, the Ponte Vecchio and the Duomo in Florence, with audio commentary available. At the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Island, users can watch videos and pod.c.asts and use a slate of interactive and innovative tools to review educational information. The U.S. National Library of Medicine has established Health Info Island with a medical library and virtual hospital facility. It will eventually offer training, outreach, consumer health resources and one-on-one support on Second Life to bring public health information and interventions to consumers where, when and how they need them.

Reaching the next frontier of service means opening up government officials, stakeholders and citizens to collaboration. Technology and tools enable productive dialogue. The array of tools--from blogs, to social networks, to wikis and beyond--will continue to evolve in their sophistication and application. They provide platforms for the collaboration that reshapes government and helps to open it up to its citizens.

The single biggest driver towards these horizons is leadership. As we've seen, political leadership and executive leadership are critical. And citizens are pushing us all. ■

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