

did you know?

CTG History Series — Part Two

CTG Celebrating Ten Years of Partnership, Research, and Innovation

In the mid 1990's, CTG was helping state and local government agencies lay the groundwork for technological and organizational networks that would change the way they work. The Web was connecting people and government in new ways. Sharing geographic information brought different agencies and program areas together with lower costs and common goals. And identifying best practices in state-local information systems built new understanding about successful intergovernmental collaboration.

Building technological and organizational networks

In 1995, the potential of the Internet to enable collaboration was just beginning to be understood. CTG projects during this time explored how both technical and organizational innovations could improve government services and operations.

“The hardest, but potentially most valuable, task is figuring out how to work across the boundaries and programs of government.”

— Sharon Dawes

The Internet Services Testbed provided an early look at the potential of using the Internet to provide government services.

Identifying Best Practices in State-Local Information Systems opened new doors for intergovernmental collaboration.

The NYS GIS Cooperative Project brought the concepts of innovation and collaboration together through the development of a prototype web clearinghouse designed to share data about existing sources of geographic information at agencies and levels of government across New York.

These were the middle years at CTG when scores of government agencies worked together in cutting-edge, and sometimes bleeding-edge, partnership projects. These interagency and intergovernmental projects entailed more coordination and complexity than our previous projects with single agencies.

“These projects showed us that interorganizational work is where we should focus. The hardest, but potentially most valuable, task is figuring out how to work across the boundaries and programs of government,” remarked Center Director Sharon Dawes. “In these projects, we developed a set of skills that allowed us to work with multiple agencies on these issues which we still use today.”

These years generated enormous learning about these issues, much of which was captured in products such as:

- *The Prototype NYS Spatial Data Clearinghouse,*
- *Tying a Sensible Knot: A Practical Guide to State-Local Information Systems,* and
- *Developing & Delivering Government Services on the World Wide Web.*



In early 1997, CTG moved to 1535 Western Avenue



Center for
Technology
in Government

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Albany, SUNY

The NYS GIS Cooperative

In the late 1980's more and more state agencies and local governments in New York were collecting geo spatial information to improve their capacity to analyze data, make decisions, and manage programs and services. New York State's Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC), Office of Real Property Services (ORPS), and Department of Transportation (DOT), among others, all rely on maps and geographic information to conduct their respective businesses.

The process for collecting this information was labor-intensive and expensive. When it became clear that different state agencies were collecting their own geo spatial data, sometimes redundantly, a number of forward thinking individuals began to explore the possibility of sharing the collection and use of this information across agencies. Similar initiatives had begun among federal agencies and in other states.

In 1994, the Center sent out a call for project proposals focused on strategic initiatives that cross the boundaries of agencies and programs. In response, Tom Donovan, who was the IT Director at DEC, presented the idea of creating a prototype database that would enable New York state and local governments to share data about the geographic information that each agency maintained.



CTG GIS Clearinghouse Project Team

“The information collected and shared in the clearinghouse exceeded what any one partner would have been able to collect or use on their own.”-- DEC Liaison Larry Alber

The idea, which held potential benefit for multiple agencies as well as unique research challenges, became a CTG project called the *NYS GIS Cooperative Project*.

“We all readily recognized the benefits of sharing that type of information,” said Larry Alber, the DEC liaison to the project. “The information collected and shared in the clearinghouse exceeded what any one partner would have been able to collect or use on their own.”

The project created a repository of meta data about geo spatial information available at participating state agencies and local governments.

From a collaboration standpoint, this project brought together more than 450 people from state, local, and federal governments. “There was a ready-made community advocating for this for years, if not decades. The project gave them a vehicle for acting on their ideas,” said Dawes.

At the time this project began, related GIS work was being conducted by other groups within New York State, all of which came together and served as the precursor to what is now the NYS GIS Clearinghouse.

“The project uncovered the critical barriers to sharing spatial data in a coordinated way. It also developed specific recommendations that would help government overcome those barriers,” said CTG Deputy Director Theresa Pardo, who was project manager for the GIS project. “All of those lessons were transferred almost directly to the development of the state GIS Clearinghouse.”

In 1996, the GIS Spatial Data Repository project was recognized by the National Association of State Chief Information Officers (NASCIO, formerly NASIRE) as the best intergovernmental application among the fifty states. In the following year, it was transferred to the New York State Library where it was extensively improved. Today it is operated and continues to grow under the aegis of the New York State Data Sharing Cooperative.



State-Local Information Systems Government Partners

Finding Best Practices in State-Local Systems

Another project that focused on cross government collaboration was the State-Local Information Systems project. The CTG partnership project brought together more than 150 state and local officials working on eleven intergovernmental information system projects (ranging from electronic voter registration to systems that support the work of county probation officers). The main goal was to identify best practices that could make these systems more manageable and more successful.

A massive amount of information exchange occurs between state and local governments everyday. Unfortunately, at that time, few systems effectively integrated service goals, business processes, and technologies across both state and local participants.

“Basically, we were frustrated with all the stove pipes,” said Stan France, who was co-chair of the Special Work Group on Intergovernmental Information Systems and is the Director of Data Processing for Schoharie County. “Local governments were looking for ways to do some consolidation, to develop standards that would help us exchange information with the state.”

“Even though the Internet was young and those technologies were just developing, local governments were tired of agencies asking them to use different platforms and different software,” said ORPS Executive Director Tom Griffen, co-chair of the work group.

The project was a partnership between CTG and the Governor’s Task Force on IRM (now the Office for Technology). The partnership set out to identify and promote best practices in building collaborative working relationships between state agencies and local governments. It identified a set of characteristics that would exemplify “ideal” intergovernmental information systems projects, and then formulated methods for overcoming the barriers to achieving them. Those methods are embodied in a best practice handbook called “Tying a Sensible Knot.”

When this project started, seven years ago, “we knew the paradigm was changing. We were moving away from state-local, top-down, hierarchical management. We knew that we had to work together differently. We had to manage more effectively in the intergovernmental zone,” Griffen said. “With ‘Tying a Sensible Knot,’ we started taking the right steps and using the right language.”

“New York’s local governments have enormous diversity in terms of size, community setting, organizational culture, structure, and staff,” said Pardo, who was the CTG project manager. “The project revealed a set of common practices that have been adopted to help state agencies and local governments work together within this diversity.”

Internet Services Testbed

In the mid-1990s New York State agencies wanted to harness the emerging Internet as a resource to provide



The Internet Services Testbed Government Partners Panel

citizens with more and better information and services. The New York State Forum for Information Resource Management's (NYSFIRM) annual member survey showed that four of the top five issues facing government managers were related to the Internet. In response, the Center brought together state and local agencies, University at Albany resources, and corporate partners in what would become known as the "Internet Services Testbed"—a project designed to explore the use of Web sites in support of agency missions.

"The Internet Services Testbed came out of a recognition that there was this new thing out there: the Internet. What does it mean? How do we take advantage of it?," said Pardo, who managed the Internet Services Testbed project.

After holding a 170-participant workshop to help identify benefits, barriers, and learning objectives of the project, ten agencies responded to the Center's call for proposals. Of those, seven were selected and the project began in January 1996. Over the next six months, agencies participated in a series of workshops designed to help them develop their first Web sites.

The project had two real objectives according to Ed DeFranco, then Director of Program Audit and Evaluation at the NYS Office of Alcoholism and Substance Abuse Services (OASAS). The first was to explore what services and information we could provide with this new technology. The second was "to expose other agencies to what we were doing, and to explain to them the knowledge level that was required" to organize information and present it on the Internet, DeFranco said.

Dawes agreed. "We were a community of learning taking a very early look at the possibilities and limitations of the Internet and its new requirements for presenting information and dealing with the public," she said.



The Internet Services Testbed Demonstration, June 20, 1996

Award-winning years

All of these projects attracted national attention.

In 1996, the spatial data clearinghouse project was recognized by the National Association of State Chief Information Officers (NASCIO) for being the best intergovernmental application among the fifty states.

In 1998, "Tying a Sensible Knot" won a recognition award for outstanding achievement in the field of information technology from NASCIO in the category of Statewide Initiatives/Policy, Planning and Management.

The Internet Services Testbed project produced a nationally recognized guide to building the organizational data and technology framework for effective use of the Web.

Our work in these projects opened up new avenues of potential research, including electronic records management issues and interorganizational information sharing.

In the next issue:

Our next and final segment of the CTG History Series will trace the work of the Center from the Using Information in Government program through Knowledge Networking in the Public Sector to a set of current projects that involve modeling interorganizational coordination, information sharing, and integration.

Did you know? is a special section of CTG's Innovations newsletter. It is designed to provide readers with more depth on work conducted by the Center.



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