

Tying a Sensible Knot: A Practical Guide to State-Local Information Systems

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State-local information systems operate in an environment of almost stunning complexity. They must recognize and account for enormous diversity of community settings, organizational cultures, structures, and staff. To be successful, they must deal with mismatched fiscal years; a range of hierarchical, team, and matrix management styles; and program-driven vs. process-driven vs. customer-driven work environments. They need to be meshed into the fabric of on-going business processes and working relationships and relate to other information systems at both the state and local levels. They are clearly not "business as usual."

We define a state-local information system as one that links state and local agencies together in a coherent service delivery or administrative environment. Such a system facilitates information sharing for the achievement of mutual program or administrative goals.

This report was written to help state and local governments work more effectively in this challenging environment. It presents both principles and practices, based on documented experience, which can lead to successful state-local information systems. The material is drawn from a cooperative project sponsored by the New York State Governor's Task Force on Information Resource Management to identify and promote the practices that lead to effective state-local systems. The project involved more than 150 state and local officials engaged in eleven such projects. The participants helped document current issues, defined the characteristics of ideal systems, and shared their good and bad experiences.