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 versus process-driven versus customer-driven work environments. They need to be meshed into the fabric of ongoing 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. These systems address both individual and common needs and result from ongoing discourse among state and local participants.

This book 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, that 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, through surveys and interviews, shared their good and bad experiences.

## The ideal state-local information system

Project participants identified dozens of characteristics that they would expect to find in the "ideal" state-local information system project. These characteristics fell into four categories: objectives, project management methods, design features, and user support features.

- The objectives of a state-local system project set the stage for all subsequent activity and evaluation. They drive all the investments of all stakeholders. Clear compelling objectives make these investments pay off.
- State-local systems projects involve a variety of players in different organizations, at different levels of government, in different locations, and sometimes in both the public and private or non-profit sectors. An ideal project management process takes all this into account.
- Systems that connect state and local government usually affect work already underway in both places. Ideally, such systems integrate with processes, information flows, technologies, and staff capabilities already in place.
- State-local systems are implemented in a wide variety of organizational settings and used by staff with a range of skills and experience.The system will only be as successful as its users can make it. User support services are a key to that success.

## Barriers to achieving ideal intergovernmental systems

The project participants also noted that state-local system projects face important barriers to success. Among them are:

- A general lack of education and information about both technology and programs
- Lack of a shared, reliable computing and network infrastructure
- Goals that are too ambitious for the resources available to achieve them
- Human and organizational resistance to change
- Unrealistic time frames
- Organizational, programmatic, technological, and legal complexity
- Changing priorities
- Overlapping or conflicting missions among the participating organizations

## Working in the state-local environment

Nine fundamental principles to guide state-local information system initiatives emerged from this study of eleven existing efforts. These principles support shared vision and commitment - vision of what is to be achieved and commitment to a collaborative way of achieving it.

1. **Understand the full range of local and state conditions.** In order for state and local levels of government to work toward the same or complementary goals, they need to understand and appreciate one another's abilities, strengths, and limitations.
2. **Have a clear purpose and realistic, measurable expectations.**
3. **Choose the right people for the jobs that need to be done.** State-local system projects demand a full range of management, programmatic, administrative, technical, and customer service skills.
4. **Expect to assemble a mixture of resources.** Most state-local systems are supported by a variety of funding and in-kind resources contributed by different organizations, with different rules of account- ability.
5. **Communicate as if your survival depends on it.** Open interchange of concerns and ideas means an ongoing flow of complete, appropriate, timely, and accurate information tailored to the needs of each audience.
6. **Design a system that integrates with your business.** A new or revised system should take account of, link with, and enhance existing operations.
7. **Demonstrate and refine ideas before you implement.** Prototypes and demonstrations make ideas tangible to users and open to improvement throughout the design process.
8. **Let common sense guide you to workable solutions.** Trust the experience and good sense of participants to define needs and uncover practical ways to meet them.

## Best practices

The eleven projects demonstrated many effective ways to put the foregoing principles into practice. Through surveys, interviews, and project documents we identified nineteen best practices that should go into the design, development, and operation of any state-local information system. The individual projects provided many illustrations of how good managers adapted these practices to the needs of their specific projects.

- Define purpose and scope
- Choose a well-skilled and respected project leader
- Recruit the right project team
- Sell the project to decision makers
- Communicate often and clearly with stakeholders
- Finance creatively
- Adopt tools and techniques that can manage complexity
- Look for existing models
- Understand and improve processes before you apply technology
- Match the technology to the job
- Use industry standard technology
- Adopt and abide by data standards
- Integrate with related processes and practices
- Use prototypes to ensure understanding and agreement about design
- Choose a capable pilot site
- Make the best use of vendors
- Train thoroughly Support users
- Review and evaluate performance