

As government Web sites grow in size and complexity, it is important for agencies to develop sounder approaches to Web site management and publication processes. Poor public image, prohibitive maintenance costs, lack of consistency, and limited capacity to provide multiple formats are just some of the problems that many government Web sites are already facing or will face in the near future. The future of e-government will depend in part on the ability of governments to manage their Web sites in a more effective and efficient way to deliver value to citizens.

The standard architecture (HTML) for most existing sites presents serious limitations for managing complex Web sites. A viable alternative to an HTML-based Web site is one rooted in XML (eXtensible Markup Language). Because it is not based on individual HTML Web pages, XML offers an innovative, long-term solution to many of the shortcomings of current Web site design tools, techniques, and publication processes.

The **Getting Started with XML** guide is based on CTG's own experience converting its Web site to XML, along with the experiences of five New York State agencies who participated in CTG's XML Testbed. The research gathered from the Testbed contributed to a greater awareness of how XML can be used for Web site management in government settings. The guide was developed with these lessons in mind, because despite the clear advantages of XML, government confronts many obstacles to the adoption and implementation of XML-based Web site management. By using the guide, government agencies can gain new insights into how they can benefit from XML and develop strategies to address the technical and organizational issues to get started.

To benefit from XML, it is not necessary to overhaul your whole Web site or even a large part of the Web. After reading through the guide, you may find that you want to start small, and then as you progress, migrate more of your Web site to an XML structure, based on the goals you wish to achieve. In both cases, your organization will benefit from the process of analysis you have begun.

This guide can be used by Webmasters, program management and staff, IT management and staff, Public Information Officers — anyone who wants a strong Web presence and an effective way to manage it. The following topics are covered to help you to get started with XML:

- A primer on what XML is and how and why it can be used to more economically and efficiently manage Web site content in a new way.
- Questions to consider before deciding whether or not your Web site can benefit from XML.
- An explanation of when XML works best and the benefits of its use.
- Guidelines on how XML can be adapted in different Web environments.
- A look at some organizational and workflow issues that will affect your XML project.