

E-government is "the use of information technology to support government operations, engage citizens, and provide government services." Within this broad definition are four dimensions that reflect the functions of government itself: e-service, e-management, e-democracy, and e-commerce. While information technology can provide alternative methods for service delivery and government operations, it requires re-thinking about current processes and functions and brings forth new questions about the way government conducts business.

One of the key promises of e-government is a reinvented government. The vision includes improved access for citizens, increased efficiency, lower costs, and greater effectiveness. Technology clearly holds potential for improving the way government works, but local governments frequently find the concept unclear and the task daunting. This challenge and success stories from across the state are the focus of a briefing released by the Center for Technology in Government, University at Albany.

The briefing, entitled **Making a Case for Local E-Government**, is based on real-life experiences of local e-government pioneers throughout New York State. CTG held workshops and interviews where local government professionals shared information on their e-government projects. They detailed strategies, funding, barriers, and benefits of their e-government initiatives, and shared insight and advice for colleagues who are just starting out. The effort was one of several identified and suggested by the NYS Office for Technology Local E-Government Advisory Committee. "The two questions that many in local government are trying to answer are how should I think about e-government and what are others doing to make it work," explains Meghan Cook, CTG Local E-gov't project leader. "Through five regional e-government

workshops we focused on those vital questions and gained a broad perspective on the status of e-government across the state."

The briefing contains case studies of successful initiatives along with recommendations and advice from e-government veterans. "Our briefing serves as a primer for local governments trying to utilize technology to pursue e-government," Meghan adds. "It allows local government officials to approach their own projects with a comprehensive, peer-oriented understanding of e-government at the local level."

The briefing features the comments of a number of local government officials representing all corners of the state. Their perspectives and hands-on knowledge provide solid ground for colleagues planning e-government initiatives for their communities.

"Local government is given a set of tasks to perform. When we are forced to choose between plowing the roads and buying a computer system, we have to plow the roads," explains John Woodward, Schenectady County Clerk. "But I also have a commitment to provide citizens with a wide-open door to government information through the Internet. The challenge is making sure that it's easy for the user without making them pay for it."

"Our town has a large number of restaurants in its community and we recently decided to revise our liquor license renewal process," says Diane Conroy- LaCivita, Deputy Clerk of the Town of Colonie. "By using e-mail, the process that used to take as long as a month and a half, today takes less than two weeks...This streamlined internal process allows us to better serve the restaurant businesses by renewing licenses faster."

And e-government programs are as much about public engagement as office efficiency notes Robert Feldman, Trustee in the Village of New Paltz. "We are really trying innovative ways to get more people involved in our village government. We have started to broadcast our village hall meetings live over the Internet. Trustees respond to real-time e-mail questions during the meeting. This new way of interacting is generating a lot of interest and excitement in the community," he adds.

"It's so important to get the message out to smaller municipalities that no one is 'too small' for e-government," says Betty Barry, Town Clerk of the Town of Victor with regard to e-government initiatives. "It shouldn't be seen as a yes or no question when it's really a matter of determining an appropriate and affordable starting point. Every town and village can benefit from an e-government initiative...Finding something that's right for them and getting started-that's the important thing."

Print versions of the **Making a Case for Local E-Government** briefing are available to local government officials by contacting CTG and are downloadable from the CTG Web site at http://www.ctg.albany.edu/publications/guides/making_a_case.