

E-Government and the Rise of Collaborations

State governments are increasingly deploying E-government strategies to provide citizens and businesses with greater access to services and information through highly innovative integrated service delivery (ISD) applications. It is, for example, now commonplace for citizens to file taxes, renew professional licenses, and track legislation through web applications available on Internet gateways or portals for each state. These applications offer numerous possibilities to use the Internet and web-based technologies to extend government services online, allow citizens to interact more directly with government, employ customer-centric services, and transform operational and bureaucratic procedures.

A central component of web-based integrated service delivery applications is the web portal. A web portal serves as the integrated gateway into a state government website and provides both external constituents and internal government personnel with a single point of contact for online access to state information and resources. State governments are very complex organizations with hundreds of agencies, departments, commissions, and regulatory bodies. Portals are web-based front-end applications that allow state governments to access and manage all of their data and information, and to deliver it to its users. Through this gateway or main user interface millions of web users can access the vast landscape of information, services, and applications available on the state web sites. In fact, government-wide web portals are emerging as a key priority for government agencies as they develop their electronic government initiatives and create electronic relationships between government and citizens (G2C), government and business (G2B), government and its employees (G2E), and government and government (G2G).

The promise of the web portal as an integrated access point to all relevant information is undeniable. Because databases and existing departmental systems are often housed on different platforms, the World Wide Web is a convenient infrastructure to use as the foundation for the transfer of data, statistics, and records across organizational boundaries. As a coordinated entryway into systems and shared databases, a web portal can provide significant cost and time-savings. For example, a child welfare employee can, in less than one hour, check a juvenile's statewide history of school attendance, medical history, and interaction with the justice system prior to foster home placement. Without this integrated system, the employee may have spent days or even weeks trying to contact to appropriate parties and access the information (1). This underlying system integration is one feature that distinguishes web portals from large-scale websites. The extent of the integration, in addition to a host of other factors, determines the level of functionality of the web portal.

Developing these web-based integrated service delivery applications is challenging and often requires capabilities that surpass the core competencies of many state government agencies. Central to developing integrated service delivery solutions for e-government includes redesigning or developing new government services and software applications, enterprise portal management and development, and backend infrastructure integration. Each E-government project requires customized solutions to make various services accessible through one interface while tying together legacy systems, new and old business processes, and layers of complex institutional and organizational policies, practices, and norms. State government agencies find that they are many times unable to use standard off the shelf solutions and must instead customize solutions to fit their particular structure, work methods and requirements(2). Consequently, as an effective strategy to overcome these challenges, such states as Indiana provide E-government services through a public-private collaboration

(1) IBM, 2001, Creating and implementing an e-government portal solution: Requirements, solution options and business model considerations. IBM Global Industries. <http://ibm.com/solutions/government>.

(2) Rob Kling et. al., 2000, "Learning from Social Informatics: Information and Communication Technologies in Human Contexts", Center for Social Informatics, Indiana University.