

Project Development

Establishment of the Coordination Program

The first statewide policy on GIS was issued by OFT in September 1996. Technology Policy 96-18 established a framework for the development of a statewide GIS Coordination Program and created a broadly representative GIS Coordinating Body drawn from state and local government and the private sector. Attempting to address concerns of all parties having an interest in the GIS data sharing effort, the Coordinating Body appointed seven working groups to reflect upon, make recommendations, and develop sharable resources in the following areas: the clearinghouse, communications, data coordination and standards, education, finance, legal issues, and digital orthoimagery. Each sector and level of government is represented in the work groups. (see organization chart).

Creation of the NYS GIS Clearinghouse

The Coordinating Body sponsored several initiatives that would put the new state GIS policy into action. The most visible of these efforts is the NYS GIS Clearinghouse. The NYS GIS Clearinghouse was created and established on the World Wide Web (<http://www.nysgis.state.ny.us>) by the New York State Library. It includes a publicly available metadata repository describing GIS data sets held by many different organizations within NYS and around the world, as well as information about how to obtain the data. It also has extensive information about New York's GIS Data Sharing Coordination Program; information on and links to GIS education and training opportunities; other state and federal GIS resources; GIS user groups throughout New York; and GIS-related listservs. In addition, users can have direct access to selected data sets from many state agencies. The Department of Transportation (DOT), the Office of Real Property Services (ORPS), and the Adirondack Park Agency (APA) were among the first ones to post their data on the site.

The Metadata Repository was created to allow producers of geographic data to describe the data sets they have available so that potential users can identify existing data before they attempt to create new data sets. Data producers describe their data sets using a simplified version of the Federal Geographic Data Committee Standard for Digital Geospatial Metadata. It includes information about who produced the data, the geographic area covered, the data set category or theme, scale, accuracy information, and how to obtain the data sets. Users access metadata by doing a search online. A list of data sets is returned as the result of a search and the complete metadata record for each of these data sets can be viewed to determine the relevance of the data to the user's need. Users then contact the data "owners" to obtain the data they want. A formal Data Sharing Cooperative (described below) gives special privileges to those who sign a data sharing agreement.

Initial IT and Human Resources: Voluntarism at Work

The initial costs of the GIS Coordination Program were minimal in terms of dollars and dedicated human resources. The equivalent of two full time employees were devoted to the Clearinghouse. In addition, the Project Director at OFT dedicated 50% of his time, supported by 50% of an additional staff member. There was also the equivalent of about six full time employees spread across the organizations participating in the Coordinating Body, Advisory Committees, and Working Groups. In addition, individual participants contributed bursts of effort at various times as issues they were concerned with came to the forefront. For example, people involved in the Legal Working Group gave many days of service in the development of data sharing agreements and legislative proposals, and members of the Data Coordination Working Group invested extraordinary effort in the development of the Data Sharing Cooperative. In dollar terms, the initial technology costs were insignificant. In order to establish the GIS Clearinghouse, a server and software already owned by the Library were reused. Disk space was borrowed or bought and some low-cost web tools were purchased.