

Political Environment as Context for New Models of Collaboration

The cases we studied fit into a overall national and regional efforts to streamline government and move toward innovative partnership models involving the use of technology deliver of public services. US, Canadian, and European policies share similar goals but differ somewhat in method and extent of implementation.

European Union (EU)

European policies and activities are the most advanced of the three. The European Council has made pan-European e-government initiatives a top priority for improving the delivery of public services to EU citizens and businesses. The stated goal of the "eEurope initiative," approved at the June 2002 European Council meeting in Seville, is to provide interactive government services throughout the European Union. The European Commission is to issue an interoperability framework to support the initiative by the end of 2003. Interoperability is sought within and between public agencies at the European, national, regional, and local levels; as well as with the private sector. The European Commission defines interoperability as "not simply a technical issue concerned with linking up computer networks. It goes beyond this to include the sharing of information between networks and the re-organization of administrative processes to support the seamless delivery of e-government services" (Commission Staff Working Document D2 414 DT: Linking Up Europe, 2003). Therefore, the eEurope initiative involves the development of new models of collaboration on a scale never seen before. eEurope aims at achieving "a modern European administration through electronic cooperation between different levels of government and across national borders" (Ministerial Declaration, Italian Presidency of the Council, 2003, p.1).

The eEurope 2005 Action Plan calls for the study of member states' electronic government projects achieved through collaboration within and between levels of administration and with the public sector. The Bremen Online Services case study is an example of a member state initiative that involves collaboration between local governments to achieve an improved public service delivery. In addition, specific attention is devoted to EU-wide electronic services in the domain of job search and learning opportunities which are considered as "examples of pan-European services to be diffused and extended to other fields" (Ministerial Declaration, Italian Presidency of the Council, 2003, p.3). The HotJob.be Belgium case study is an example of such an initiative in the domain of job search. The portal has been enhanced by partnerships with several employment agencies in Europe to allow the citizen to expand its job search.

Canada

Canada has been recognized as a world leader in the field of e-government because of its focus on departmental and jurisdictional integration and commitment to respond to citizens and businesses needs. A 2003 survey of worldwide e-government initiatives led by Accenture rated Canada as number one for the third year in a row.

Canada's Government On-Line (GOL) initiative, launched in 1999, aims to make Canada "the government most connected to its citizens with Canadians able to access all government information and services on-line at the time and place of their choosing." The federal government committed to providing on-line access to **all** federal programs and services, through collaboration across agencies and with the private sector, by 2004. A Government On-Line Advisory Panel (GOLAP) was created in 2001 to advise the Treasury Board on ways to achieve this ambitious goal. The GOLAP is made of representatives from the public, private, nonprofit, and academic sectors, as well as citizens.

The GOL initiative is focused on three priorities: (1) organization of government information and services by user needs instead of government structures; (2) on-line availability of government information and forms; and (3) provision of transactional services through secure networks.

The first priority requires government agencies to collaborate in order to provide integrated services that better respond to citizen and business needs: "working with provincial, territorial, and municipal governments to realize this vision will take time, but this 'citizen first' view of service delivery is at the heart of what we are trying to accomplish with GOL" (Government of Canada, Government On-Line and Canadians: Overview Report, Ottawa, 2002, p. 7). The design and launch of Service Canada, the federal government information portal, illustrates the citizen-centered approach. The site abandoned the traditional agency-based organization of government services and information for a classification according to citizen, business, or international audience needs. The Canadian Government also strives to better serve the business community by providing one-stop access points where businesses can learn about government regulations and register with several agencies. Ontario Business Connect and One-Stop Business Registration are examples of such services designed to improve government-private sector relationships.

The Canadian government is also committed to providing access to e-government services to **all** citizens, even those who may not be computer literate. For this purpose, Human Resources Development Canada launched the Ambassadeur Project aimed at providing citizens with assistance in using the Internet at both the local and regional levels. Free public Internet terminals in Community Access Centers (CACs) are available to use for free in urban and rural communities throughout Canada.

United States (US)

Governments in the United States have been experimenting with different forms of collaboration for several decades. These range from quite traditional forms to more innovative types. The most common are characterized by formal purchase contracts for private sector goods and services, or long-term service arrangements which usually engage nonprofit organizations to offer publicly-funded social programs such as shelters or day care. In the 1990s additional forms of collaboration began to emerge that incorporated different philosophies about the arrangement of interests among the parties. These include outsourcing entire organizational functions, public-private partnerships, and full privatization of formerly public programs. These are less common, but growing in number. At the same time, interest and experimentation have grown significantly in cross-agency and intergovernmental collaborations entirely inside the public sector.

In 2001, the Bush Administration initiated a series of government reform efforts known as the President's Management Agenda (PMA) to improve government accountability, effectiveness, and responsiveness to citizens. One of the PMA initiatives is **Expanding Electronic Government**, which focuses on "modernizing IT investments within agencies using the principles of e-business (and) integrating IT investments across agencies centered around groups of citizens" (Office of Management and Budget, E-Government Strategy, April 2003, p. 2). An E-Government Task Force identified 24 critical cross-agency E-Government initiatives.

One of the main PMA goals for e-government is to develop cross-agency solutions to provide more one-stop access points of government information for citizens and businesses, similar to FirstGov.gov, the US government information portal. FirstGov was initiated as a public-private partnership and later evolved into an interagency public-public collaboration. Another public-private project is Free File, an extension of the pre-existing IRS e-filing system that will allow free online preparation and electronic tax filing provided by Industry Partners.

Cross-agency efforts to provide one-stop access points to government information have also been implemented at the state level. The New York State (NYS) Geographic Information System (GIS) Coordination Program is a joint effort of state and local governments to provide statewide access to GIS data. State governments are leaders in the domain of public-private partnerships. State portals, such as Access Indiana, are based on a true partnership between the private and public sectors. Access Indiana is one of several state portals using a unique self-funding model where the private partner derives its income from fees imposed on premium services and online transactions.

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European Case Studies	
Project	Government Sponsor
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HotJob.be	Belgium
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IRS E-file	Federal Government
First Gov	Federal Government