

Meghan Kiernan, project management specialist, Center for Technology in Government

Meghan welcomed everyone to the second session in the Using Information in Government Program Seminar Series. The objective of the Seminar Series is to share the lessons learned in the UIG program with New York State government program and information technology managers. The Seminar Series began on February 4, 1999 with a session on "Dealing with Data." "Information Use Tools and Skill Sets" were covered on May 4. The Series will continue with "What Rules Govern the Use of Information" on October 5 and "Using Information in Government: Two Years of Lessons Learned" in January 2000.

The focus of the May 4 session was to provide an overview of the UIG program, explore information use tools and skills sets, look into knowledge management, hear about real life cases from the NYS Department of Health, Department of Transportation, and Office of Mental Health, and engage in a panel discussion.

She recalled the genesis of the UIG program, which began in the summer of 1997 when information resource and program managers responded to a New York State Forum for Information Resource Management survey about the types of issues they encounter when trying to use information for planning, evaluating, and decision making in their organizations. CTG held a kickoff meeting to identify the problems public sector managers encounter in using government information to do their jobs. That meeting yielded many information use issues, including: lack of incentive to share; lack of understanding of the value of integrating data and using it to support decision making and planning; lack of understanding of the technical, human, and organizational requirements; and lack of understanding of the real potential of the technology.

Out of these issues, CTG identified a set of objectives for the UIG program:

- recommend policies or policy templates to guide public officials in their use of government information;
- develop and assess data standards, inventories, and quality assurance tools;
- develop and assess the cost-benefit models and other measures of information value;
- specify the information use skills necessary for government professionals and recommend ways to acquire them;
- assess the cost effectiveness of various technical tools and techniques;
- and develop collaborative and collective resources for data users.

For more than 14 months, CTG has been working with state agencies on projects that explore the information issues and meet program objectives. The practical products of this work will include: a set of practical guidelines for developing an IT business case, the UIG Seminar Series, a cost performance model for projects that focus on information sharing, case studies, and recommendations for the NYS Office for Technology about their information use policies. The first phase of UIG involved projects with the Office of the State Comptroller's Division of Municipal Affairs (OSC), the Central New York Psychiatric Center (CNY), and the Office of Temporary and Disability Assistances Bureau of Housing Services (BHS). From these projects, we have learned several lessons, Meghan said. CTG and the project teams learned that the way information is used and interpreted has evolved to the level that new skills are required. Increased access to information in its varied formats requires organizations to change the way they train employees to access and use that information. Simply placing new technologies with extensive functionality on desktops does not ensure the most effective use of information; information literacy needs to be the focus.

Meghan detailed how the UIG program is continuing. CTG is conducting an evaluation of the first round, which included focus groups with project teams to gain insight on how to design the second round. Follow up consulting is being conducted with two teams, OSC's Division of Municipal Affairs and the CNY Psychiatric Center. The Bureau of Housing Services and CTG are working on an innovation project, the Homeless Information Management System, which will be prototyped and evaluated this summer. The projects for round two were just selected and were scheduled to be announced publicly in late May.

The speakers for "Information Use Tools and Skill Sets" were:

- Theresa Pardo of CTG who spoke about "Information Use Tools and Skill Sets: Keeping Up with the Times;"
- Jochen Scholl, also of CTG, who discussed "Knowledge Management Tools;"
- Peter Lannon and Robert Pennacchia of the NYS Department of Health who covered "New Tools and New

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- Skills to Improve Access to Information: Medicaid Managed Care Encounter Data System;"
- Frank Winters of the NYS Department of Transportation who discussed "New Tool to View and Analyze Capital Program Plans: Executive GIS Capital Program Viewer;" and
- Michael Mittleman of the NYS Office of Mental Health who spoke about "New Tool to Monitor, Control, and Assess Overtime Consumption: Overtime Analysis Intranet Application."