

This report summarizes the results of a national survey of cross-boundary information sharing in the public sector conducted as a part of a National Science Foundation-funded project at the Center for Technology in Government (CTG) at the University at Albany, State University of New York. Researchers at CTG designed the survey to collect the perceptions of public servants and government officials about cross-boundary information sharing (CBI) initiatives and to test a causal model of the interactions of social and technical factors in these initiatives. The primary purpose of the survey was to understand how a specific set of policy, organizational, social, and technical factors influence government CBI initiatives.

The survey tested 41 factors (Appendix II), all of which were pre-identified based on the research and analysis conducted by CTG during earlier phases of the project. The initial theoretical model represented in the 41 factors introduced in the survey is based on eight case studies of cross-boundary information sharing in criminal justice and public health across the United States. This report summarizes the responses of the 173 public health and criminal justice professionals who participated in the 2008 survey.

The survey questions focused on the existence and nature of the 41 factors as they related to the CBI initiatives reported on by the survey respondents. Respondents were asked their opinions about a mix of policy, organizational, social, and technical factors that relate to one specific, U.S.-based government CBI initiative that they had personally participated in within the last five years. Respondents were asked to choose the initiative they knew the best, regardless of its current status (e.g., still in development, defunct, or implemented), level of success, or effectiveness. It is important to note that the survey participants were overwhelmingly positive in their perceptions of the success and outcomes of the CBI initiatives on which they chose to report.

The mean age of survey respondents was 52 and the number of male respondents is slightly higher than female respondents. Respondents reported an average of 11 years of experience with CBI initiatives, and having participated in an average of seven initiatives during their careers. Also, respondents spent an average of 14 hours per week working on such initiatives. Nearly half of the respondents identified themselves as having a leadership role (e.g., executive sponsor or project manager) in the initiative in which they participated. As far as other types of roles that respondents identified themselves as having in their initiative, one third characterized themselves as project team members, nearly ten percent identified themselves as users, and another almost ten percent indicated "Other" such as project oversight, information provider, or a representative of state government. The majority of respondents identified themselves as agency executives or managers of both program and IT departments in their day-to-day jobs. Only a small percentage of respondents identified themselves as program or IT staff.

Characteristics of Survey Respondents

Mean Age: **52**

Average Years of CBI Experience: **11**

Average # of Career CBI Initiatives: **7**

Average CBI hours/week: **14**

Role in CBI Initiative:

- **Leadership 50%**
- **Team member 30%**
- **User 10%**
- **Other 10%**

In terms of initiative characteristics, respondents reported that most initiatives were implemented at the state level, but funding for these initiatives came from a mix of federal and state sources. The majority of the initiatives were aimed at building general information sharing capability rather than solving a specific problem.

Initiative Characteristics

- Majority were state level
- Funded by a mix of federal/state
- Majority focused on general information sharing capability

More than half of the respondents reported that their initiative resulted in effective work relationships across organizational boundaries and provided opportunities to share formal and informal knowledge across organizational boundaries. In addition, more than half of the respondents reported that the initiative resulted in interoperable computer systems. While the responses related to the effectiveness of the initiative indicated increased effectiveness and efficiency occurred to a great extent by improving day-to-day operations of government and delivering benefits to persons, organizations, or groups, an overwhelming majority of respondents indicated that their initiatives resulted in increased public participation only to a minimal extent. Finally, the majority of respondents reported that the initiative was a success and met its stated policy objectives and goals.

Overall Results of Initiatives

- Effective work relationships across organizational boundaries
- Opportunities to share information
- Interoperable computer systems
- Increased effectiveness and efficiency
- Success in meeting stated policy and goals

Basic statistical measures identified significant differences between different respondent and project demographics. For example, criminal justice initiatives, state initiatives, implemented initiatives, and initiatives that aimed at building general capability received higher scores related to success. Moreover, participants who had more experience (i.e., years working on and number of CBI initiatives) reported higher scores for participants' knowledge, skills, trust among participants, and willingness to participate.

The majority of respondents indicated that most of the 41 factors influenced their CBI initiatives. Looking at the responses with the highest means, while the majority of respondents indicated that information privacy, disclosure, and confidentiality were issues in the initiative, an even higher percentage of respondents indicated that concerns and needs about each of these issues were met in the course of the initiative. In response to a series of questions about the extent to which participants were knowledgeable about their own organizations in the context of the CBI initiatives, many of the survey participants indicated that these factors existed to a large extent and were more prevalent than other factors. The "knowledge of own organization" factors specifically included knowledge of policies, information needs, and management practices. According to the respondents, the use of appropriate and effective strategies was another one of the top factors influencing their CBI initiatives. However, while formal strategies received a high ranking from respondents, the existence of informal problem solving was also identified as equally important. We believe further investigation is warranted to better understand the relationship between informal problem solving and appropriate and effective strategies within a government cross-boundary information sharing environment.

Most Frequent Factors Influencing Initiatives

- Information Privacy
- Information Disclosure
- Information Confidentiality
- Knowledge of Own Organization

On the other hand, when we looked at the responses with the lowest means (representing factors that existed to a minimal extent or not at all), respondents reported that participants had little knowledge about other participating organizations in the CBI initiatives. More specifically, survey respondents indicated that knowledge about the management practices, information technologies, and policies of other organizations in the initiative tended to exist at a much lower level than the majority of other factors, especially those factors focused on "knowledge of own organization." We find this result very interesting and worthy of additional investigation. Based on our earlier analysis of the project's qualitative data and the general assumption that successful collaboration with new partners requires increased knowledge about one another, we were surprised to see that these factors did not exist to a much greater extent, even in initiatives that were considered successful.

Least Frequent Factors Influencing Initiatives

- Knowledge of Other

Executive Summary

- Participating Organizations
- Existence and Influence of
- Legislation and Legislative Support
- Legislative or Executive mandates

Also of interest was the finding that the existence and influence of legislation and legislative support was overwhelmingly not a factor in the initiatives. In addition, very few respondents indicated that the decision-making structure for their initiative was established through legislation or executive mandate. Overall, respondents consistently stated that existing legislation neither interfered with nor made their initiatives possible.

The results of this survey support the existence of a comprehensive set of factors that are present in and influence government CBI initiatives. In addition, the results of our preliminary analysis of this survey highlight a number of factors worthy of further study. Overall, the identification of these factors through our research will contribute to the information sharing literature. In addition, the identification of a consistent set of factors and the understanding of how they interact to influence CBI initiatives will provide practitioners from around the world with important knowledge necessary to ultimately improve government operations and services.
