

“The Electronic Commons: a community led natural resource knowledge portal” was a collaborative program developed by the Wood Education and Resource Center of the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Forest Service, Northeastern Area States. The program was designed to increase understanding of the potential benefits of and challenges to using information technology for communication and knowledge sharing among natural-resource professionals and volunteer organizations, schools and communities neighboring national forests, as well as individuals interested in learning about natural-resource management. Eight project teams were funded to explore technology-based strategies such as Web sites and Webinars as tools for sharing knowledge on natural-resource topics of concern to their communities and to build communities of practice.

This toolkit is the product of a ninth project funded through the **Electronic Commons Program** to produce a guidance document for future similar efforts undertaken in the natural resources community. The Center for Technology in Government (CTG) at the University at Albany in New York was added to the **Electronic Commons Program** with a focus on documenting the experiences of the eight project teams for use by others with similar conditions and objectives. To capture the experiences and insights of the project teams, CTG conducted a series of teleconferences with each of the teams. The teleconferences were also used to provide advice to the teams, drawn from the Center's experience in working with government agencies and not-for-profit organizations involved in information technology innovations. Each teleconference involved discussions about problem and context analysis, project planning and technology decision making. These sessions drew heavily on *Making Smart IT Choices*, a publication CTG developed to guide government managers through the problem analysis and project planning required in successful government information technology innovations.

Following the teleconferences CTG conducted a two-day reflection workshop with representatives from each of the eight projects to reflect on preliminary findings from the teleconferences and to capture additional detail on the projects. This toolkit is the product of these conversations; in it we present insights from the project teams, both in the opportunities and challenges facing them in their particular project, as well as the utility of the various resources, such as *Making Smart IT Choices*, made available to the teams. Advice for use by funding organizations was also captured from the project teams and is shared here as well.