

Geographic Information Systems (GIS) are powerful tools to understand and solve problems associated with place and geography. GIS spatial analysis and display capacities allow a holistically organized view of a community and its citizens because they provide the ability to overlay and analyze interrelationships among disparate kinds data. GIS is used by local, state, and federal governments, as well as businesses, in a wide range of domains including economic development, environmental management, education, health, public safety, human services, infrastructure management, planning, zoning, real property records management, elections and redistricting, and disaster preparedness and response.

The features and analytical capabilities of GIS technologies continue to improve, while their costs have steadily declined. The most expensive part of a GIS program, however, is the creation of spatial data. Experts estimate that as much as 80% of the cost of any application is attributable to the expenses associated with acquiring and geo-coding information. Unfortunately, the most valuable and beneficial data sets (i.e., those created at the highest spatial resolutions) are the most costly to create and maintain. Therefore, only a relatively small number of government agencies make significant spatial data development investments. Agencies with smaller budgets, especially in local government, are generally the least able to undertake significant investment although they are in great need of spatial data for many service areas.

Since the information needs of different GIS applications overlap and data created by one organization can often be used by others, data sharing can help reduce costs for GIS application development and yield considerable benefits and efficiencies. Partnerships are needed to share in the creation and coordinated use of GIS data sets between governments and private entities at all levels. To achieve this purpose, the State of New York has implemented a NYS GIS Coordination Program, an innovative model for data sharing and partnerships.

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