

## **X. Remaining Questions**

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The problems described in Section VI above continue to need attention and the strategies currently employed seem well suited to their eventual solution. Time will tell how effectively they work. There are, however, two important questions, one long-standing and one recently emerged, that need to be tackled in the coming months and years.

### **Making a business case for GIS investments**

For the most part, the cost-benefit of sharing existing spatial data is easy to make and understand. It is not difficult to show how the re-use of existing data saves time and money that would otherwise be spent to acquire and prepare new data for GIS applications. This case, however, presumes that the initial decision to invest in GIS applications has already been made. In many instances this is correct, but in many others the first decision to employ GIS requires a business case that shows how GIS applications contribute to the effectiveness, timeliness, or economy of some other governmental or business activity. The same case needs to be made in order to engage in any major spatial data development projects to create data that does not already exist. This is a difficult challenge that neither the New York Program, nor other governmental programs, nor academic researchers have been able to meet satisfactorily. The costs are readily apparent. But, since so much of the benefit of GIS applications flows from the ability to do new things, there is seldom a set of baseline data from which to measure improvement. This issue will continue to be a challenge to engaging new partners and developing new spatial data resources.

### **Making the transition from a mostly volunteer effort to a formal program**

The New York Program has largely satisfied pent up demand for a formally endorsed and supported GIS Coordination mechanism. Since it is no longer a “cause” for many, it is more difficult to sustain the volunteer effort that helped define and launch it. Since it works well, most participants have come to regard it as a traditional program that needs its own organizational home, staff, and other resources. It needs continuing leadership and enough staff to “hold the center” of the collaboration among many players whose primary objective is not collaboration itself, but the work of their own organizations that the collaboration facilitates. Relationships still need to be forged, especially with the private sector and additional local governments, and these take a considerable amount of one-on-one personal contact and follow up by staff who is dedicated to nurturing and supporting the collaboration.

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