

This case and the others in this series examine how government IT investments come to deliver value to the public, what we call public return on investment (Public ROI). The cases are part of a larger project to develop a new framework for assessing public returns to government IT investment. The results of these case studies and related research are featured in a white paper that presents the framework and recommendations for conducting public ROI assessment for government IT projects. All five case study reports and the white paper are available at CTG's Web site.

In each of the case studies, we examine how the IT investment was conceived and developed, with particular attention to the role of public value in the process. We take the view that government IT investment generates public value two ways:

- By improving the value of the government itself from the perspective of the citizens.
- By delivering benefits directly to persons, groups, or the public at large.

The first way is based on the idea that, assuming a government has benign intentions, the better it functions overall, the better off its citizens will be. The government is an asset to the community or nation that delivers a wide range of values. Internal improvements enhance its value to the public. Returns of value to citizens and the public at large can be described as financial, political, and social. Financial returns result from lowering the cost or increasing the efficiency of government as well as delivering direct financial benefits to the citizens. Political returns consist of increasing government fairness, transparency, legitimacy, etc., or giving advantage to elected officials or citizens. Social and psychological returns include increased social status, new relationships or opportunities, increased safety, trust in government, and economic advantage. These concepts of public value guide the data collection and presentation of the case results.

The case studies examine public value of returns to government IT investment, including the nature of the returns themselves and the mechanisms to produce them. We do this by considering the links between investment goals, implemented systems, government performance, and public returns as represented in Figure 1 (below)

Figure 1. Public ROI Value Propositions

The public returns from the investment can flow from the internal improvements in the agency resulting in returns to individual citizens and the public at large (the main flow through the left). Other returns can flow to the political system and the economic environment (below the left), or through effects on other agencies (secondary performance gains). This general view of public returns informs the case studies and helps summarize the results.

The case studies were conducted through site visits and interviews with the participants in each project, combined with review of project documents and other evidence. We are indebted to Sam Reed, Washington Secretary of State and the members of his staff, especially Adam Jansen, Steve Excell, and Jerry Handfield for their generous participation in the interviews and hospitality during our time in Olympia. The findings and views expressed in this report, however, are those of the authors alone and do not reflect the policies or views of the participants or the State of Washington.
