

The term social media, similar to Web 2.0, encompasses a wide range of tools that generally serve three different purposes. Collaborative tools, such as Wikis, are designed to foster collaboration among various parties that would otherwise face organizational or geographical barriers to their efforts to collaborate. Social networking tools, such as Facebook, LinkedIn, or MySpace, enable social networking, whether for purely personal use (like connecting with one's friends and family) or creating communities of people centered around a common interest. Lastly, communication tools, such as Twitter, are designed to foster information sharing in real time. All of these tools can be used internally to a government agency, such as using wiki designed to enhance collaborative capabilities among various departments within an agency; or externally to establish collaborative capabilities across agencies. They can also be used externally for dissemination of information to constituents or for collecting input on proposed services, policies, and other issues. For the purposes of the government workshop, we asked participants to consider the entire range of issues connected to the different purposes and tools outlined above.

The first workshop took place at the Center for Technology in Government on September 17, 2009 from 8:30 – 10:30 a.m. It was attended by twenty-three government professionals from sixteen state agencies, as well as one representative from the New York State Forum. The workshop began with a brief introduction to the project, followed by two plenary sessions concentrating on the values sought, and issues and areas of concern in government use of social media. Participants also provided information about their agencies' existing or planned social media projects that could be later shared with all participants.

The second workshop was held as part of the bi-annual New York State Local Government IT Directors Association Conference on October 8, 2009. It was attended by approximately 40 local government professionals representing over 25 counties and other local government entities. Given the larger size of this group, a different facilitation approach was selected to ensure a fruitful discussion. The workshop began with a presentation of the benefits and concerns collected from the first workshop. The participants were then asked to rank both lists and add any additional benefits or concerns they felt were missing. The group felt that the benefits and concerns articulated in the first workshop represented their situation accurately and so did not add any items to either of the lists. The workshop then concluded with a facilitated discussion of what kind of product or report would be most useful to the participants for analyzing social media use in their local governments.

## Results from state agency workshop: Values sought from social media tools

The first session at the first workshop focused on the following question: *What value can your agency gain from using social media tools?* Participants worked for five minutes individually and wrote their answers on separate pieces of paper. The facilitator then collected the answers in a round robin fashion and posted them. The participants were then asked, with the help of a CTG facilitator, to group the answers into the eleven categories presented below (for a detailed listing of all answers within each category, please see Appendix A). The list is not presented in rank-order and the numbers serve simply for ease of reference:

1. *Greater competitiveness in employee recruiting* The public sector has had difficulties competing against the private sector in attracting new, young talent to their agencies. The workshop participants believed that not using social media further disadvantages their agencies because they “do not have a presence” in spaces generally populated by the next workforce generation. In other words, even if social media tools are not used specifically for recruiting activities, a mere agency presence on social media networks provides needed exposure to the new generation.
2. *Enhanced access for the disabled* The participants believed that social media tools could provide an additional avenue for access to government information for the disabled population of New York State. While not all social media tools are equally suited for use by the disabled (different disabilities render some tools more useful than others for an individual), participants viewed providing an alternate channel for communication and service delivery as important to improving the experience of the disabled with government agencies.
3. *Creation of virtual communities* Some social media tools offer the possibility of building a “virtual” community around an issue area or general topic of interest. The participants viewed this as beneficial to their agencies because these communities could eventually serve as an additional source of information for constituents and thus decrease the number of routine inquiries agencies receive. In times of severe budget shortfalls, providing such additional benefit at low or no cost to the agency was seen as very desirable.
4. *Instantaneous information sharing* The participants saw the instantaneous nature of social media as one of its key benefits to government agencies. Not only do social media tools provide additional communication channels, they do so in real time, irrespective of time or location of the sender or recipient. This feature is especially important for communication to citizens during emergencies, as well as receiving information from

citizens in time of a disaster or accident. In addition, participants stated that social media can free them from the restraints of traditional media outlets, allowing them to post information on their own schedule instead of a set news cycle. These tools also enable them to post information about things customarily deemed “not news worthy” by commercial or other media, yet may be seen as important to their constituents.

5. *Enhanced collaboration* Participants saw collaborative social media tools, especially internal agency wikis, as crucial to enabling collaboration among agency departments that typically do not work well with one another. This enhanced ability to share knowledge and information in turn could improve agency operations as problems are solved from multiple perspectives instead of one isolated and limited viewpoint. In addition to internal collaboration, participants also hoped that social media tools would enhance their collaborations with other state agencies and allow them to learn and share information with agencies from other states. In other words, collaborative social media tools allow people to take advantage of cumulative knowledge and experience irrespective of time or geography, thus contributing to further improvement of agency operations.
6. *Enhanced public safety* Participants viewed social media tools as potentially improving public safety by allowing increased dissemination of pertinent information in a time of emergency. They also allow for more targeted distribution of agency information to populations at risk on issues such as domestic violence or health concerns like H1N1 or AIDS. In addition to enabling wider dissemination of agency information, the instantaneous nature of social media has the potential to improve coordination and response among rescue teams in emergency situations by allowing for continuous and wide dissemination of status updates.
7. *Information dissemination and exchange* Not surprisingly, virtually all participants viewed information dissemination and exchange as one of the key benefits of social media. The majority of participants emphasized the importance of communication to citizens, especially concerning improving public awareness of government services, increasing their access to young generations traditionally viewed as a difficult population to reach, and giving the public greater access to government services. While participants also mentioned the desire to receive feedback and input from their constituency and to create dialogue with the public, they emphasized it less frequently. In addition to increasing information dissemination externally with the public, several participants also mentioned increasing information flow internally within the agency.
8. *“Coolness” factor* While government is perceived to be many things, it is rarely perceived as “cool,” especially by younger generations. Participants viewed social media tools as potential means for enhancing the citizenry’s image of government as being in touch with current technology and able to react quickly to emerging technologies. Participants also believed that social media tools would allow them to put a “human face” on their agency, thus improving the public perception of the agency and government as a whole.
9. *Improved training capabilities* Social media tools could improve training for government employees by facilitating the sharing of training materials with others and simply allowing more employees to take advantage of training by making it widely available. Additionally, participants also saw social media as being beneficial for training of external customers by giving agencies a venue for easy dissemination of its materials to external entities.
10. *Documentation* Participants viewed certain social media tools, specifically internal collaborative tools, as serving an important function of creating a common information depository that is openly available to all agency staff. This function of making consistent information available to all agency employees in turn benefits the public by making responses to public inquiries consistent over time and over disparate departments that might otherwise provide different answers to the same question. This function is especially important in disseminating agency interpretations of relevant legislations so that they are freely available to all departments at the same time without having to rely solely on more cumbersome forms of communication.
11. *Cost saving* Not surprisingly given the current economic climate, social media was also seen as a potential cost-saving measure. Specifically, participants mentioned that agencies could potentially save money on travel by using social media for collaborative efforts that would otherwise require people’s presence at a given location, harnessing the power of communities in providing answers to the public, and saving money by greater reliance on electronic communication over other traditional methods.

## Results from state agency workshop: Social media issues and concerns

In the second session participants concentrated on describing the challenges their agencies are facing or have faced in connection with social media use. Specifically, they answered the following question: *What are the most pressing questions/concerns/challenges that your agency is facing in regards to social media tools?* Participants worked individually for five minutes and wrote their answers on separate pieces of paper. They then shared their answers in a round robin fashion and the facilitator posted them on the white board. After all of the responses were collected, the group again clustered them into eight larger categories. The participants were then asked to prioritize among the eight categories and, with the help of four sticky dots, select four areas of concern that they

viewed as the most pressing for their agency. The resulting rank-ordered list is as follows (for a detailed listing of all answers within each category, please see Appendix B):

1. *Resources* The highest ranking concern among the workshop participants with respect to using social media tools is the availability of resources. In general, the concerns centered around three major types of resources: technical, staff, and training. In terms of technical resources, participants were concerned about having the necessary bandwidth to support streaming videos, additional security precautions to protect the agency networks from the virus and malware-rich world of social media, and simply having enough disk space to support some of the applications. In addition to technical resources, participants also emphasized the labor-intensive nature of social media, from having to continuously update information and maintain the sites to responding to an increased number of inquiries and comments from citizens. All these resources would also have to be produced in multiple languages, further exacerbating the strain on current employees. In addition, participants discussed the additional burden placed on managers and IT personnel for monitoring use by employees to ensure legality and appropriateness. Participants expressed concern whether the agency staff would be able to take on these additional responsibilities without the ability to hire additional staff. Similarly, participants also mentioned the need for additional training of their employees, whether on the use social media for official purposes or training employees on new policies with respect to personal use of social media during work hours.
2. *Legal and regulatory ramifications* The second highest ranked category of concerns spanned a number of large issues that could be summarized under the category of legal and regulatory ramifications. There were roughly four areas of concern under this category: monitoring appropriate use by agency employees, regulation of accuracy of content, adherence to existing federal and state laws, and ramifications of entering into legal agreements with social media providers. Monitoring appropriate use by agency employees encompassed things such as ensuring that employees were not engaging in inappropriate activity on agency computers and that productivity levels are not suffering due to employees "socializing" while at work. Participants were also concerned about the legal ramifications of ensuring accuracy of content on an agency social media site. More specifically, concerns related to posting of inaccurate information in the agency's name, whether intentionally or accidentally, and the resulting liability for consequences resulting from such misinformation. Adherence to state and federal regulations was also of concern to workshop participants. Some worried that censoring content posted by citizenry could potentially violate an individual's First Amendment rights. Others were more concerned about adhering to e-discovery and FOIA laws and regulations. Lastly, the workshop participants expressed concern regarding legal agreements that an agency would have to accept in order to use some of the current social media tools. State regulations explicitly prohibit an agency to agree to some of the terms of use and the provisions in some agreements that give the site rights to content. This was particularly troubling for agencies considering posting images of artwork or other copyrighted material.
3. *Governance* Participants ranked governance questions as the third highest concern. Three themes dominated the overall discussion about governance: who can post information on agency's behalf, leakage of sensitive information, and perceived endorsement of advertisements posted on the same page as the agency site. The question of who within the organization will be responsible for posting information and ensuring accuracy of that information was very sensitive for many of the participants. Many worried that if this question is not clearly specified, the agency might face a situation where a number of employees are posting inaccurate or inconsistent information. Leakage of sensitive information involved not only information about citizens, but also sensitive agency information that could potentially jeopardize agency operations or at least cause embarrassment. Lastly, participants were concerned that since control over content would not be fully in their hands, the agency would be viewed as endorsing views or advertisements posted on or around their social media sites.
4. *Making a business case* In an era of sparse resources, organizations routinely use cost benefit calculations when proposing new initiatives, such as use of social media tools. In general, concerns in this category fell into three areas: fast pace of change in this environment, potential political risks, and loss of opportunities stemming from use of one tool over another. The participants mentioned on several occasions that the speed of change in the social media landscape is stunning, making it very difficult for slow-changing government agencies to keep up. Participants expressed fears that an investment of precious resources will be wasted if tools selected soon disappear. A different area of concern involved potential harm that could come to an agency if an oversight or legislative body used negative public comments posted on the agency's social media site to justify cutting funding for a specific program. Lastly, participants were concerned about possible missed opportunities resulting from making a decision about using a specific tool without the benefit of detailed knowledge of the entire social media landscape. They worried that if they invest in one tool, they will be precluded from investing in a different tool in the future that might be better suited for fulfilling the agency's mission.

5. *Security* Participants ranked security concerns quite high. In general, there were three areas of security concern: security of agency infrastructure, security of citizens, and security of sensitive or confidential data. Given the relatively unsecured environment of social media, participants repeatedly mentioned the need to protect agency networks from accidental exposure to malware and limit exposure to hacking. Workshop participants also felt responsible for ensuring that use of an agency social media site does not expose citizens to computer viruses and malware or endangers their physical safety by encouraging them to check their messages while driving or other similar activities. Lastly, securing confidential data against hacking or simple information leakage was an issue of particular concern to the participants.
6. *Accessibility* Interestingly, while many participants hoped that social media would enhance access to government information and services for the disabled, they also worried about making sure that the social media tools they select will be fully accessible, both for the disabled and economically disadvantaged populations. Namely, they worried about making all venues conform to the requirements put forth by NYS technology policies and standards and making sure they do not further perpetuate disadvantages of people who do not have access to high speed internet.
7. *Perception* The importance of executive support has long been recognized as crucial to any new organizational endeavor and social media use is no exception. Workshop participants expressed concern that getting buy-in from the agency managers could be potentially difficult depending on the views of the particular executive regarding social media tools. Some participants worried that their agency executives might see social media as “time-wasters” and have difficulty seeing the potential value of social media tools. They reported that their executives are worried about the potential damage to their agency stemming from data leaks or being seen as wasting tax payers money on frivolous and “too cool for government” pursuits. In addition to these concerns, workshop participants also expressed worries about the public’s perception of government agencies using social media tools. On one hand they feared creating false expectations for young people, and on the other hand worried about citizens viewing social media as “fun” and “social” and thus not appropriate for government agencies funded by taxpayers money.
8. *Information overload* Finally, workshop participants were also concerned about the volume of information that is currently “out there” and further adding to this volume by posting more information. Overloading citizens with information from a variety of sources, they feared, would ultimately result in confusion as citizens would not be able to digest all this information, sort through it all, and verify sources. They were concerned that important agency messages would get lost in the sea of information that already exists.

## Results from local government workshop

The lists generated from the first workshop with state agencies were presented to local government professionals at the second workshop. The local government participants were then asked to rank both lists in order of importance. The benefits were ranked as follows:

Exploratory Social Media Project: Phase I Ranking of social media benefits by local government workshop participants		
<i>Rank</i>	<i>Benefit/value</i>	<i>Number of votes</i>
1	Information dissemination and exchange	40
2	Enhanced public safety	34
3	Enhanced collaboration	30
4	Instantaneous information sharing	27
5	Improved training capabilities	10
6	Coolness factor	8
7	Cost savings	7
8	Greater competitiveness in employee recruiting	6
9	Enhanced access for disabled	5
10	Creation of virtual communities	3
11	Documentation	1

The participants ranked the issues and areas of concerns as well. As you can see in the table below, the two groups ranked the eight individual areas of concern somewhat differently.

Exploratory Social Media Project: Phase I Ranking of social media areas of concern by local government workshop participants			
<i>Ranking by local government professionals</i>	<i>Ranking by state agency professionals</i>	<i>Area of concern</i>	<i>Number of votes</i>
1	3	Governance	32
2	2	Legal and regulatory ramifications	24
3	7	Perception	23
4	5	Security	22
5	1	Resources	18
6	8	Information overload	5
7	4	Making a business case	1
8	6	Accessibility	0