

What Rules Govern the Use of Information?

The first round of the Using Information in Government (UIG) Program, which investigates how New York State government agencies can make the best use of information to carry out their missions, yielded some practical lessons for government program and information technology (IT) managers. CTG created the **UIG Seminar Series** as a way to share those lessons with our government and IT colleagues. The Seminar Series kicked off in February with a session on " Dealing with Data " and continued in May with " Information Use Tools and Skill Sets ." The third session, "**What Rules Govern the Use of Information,**" was held Oct. 5 and the last seminar will take place on Feb. 9, 2000 and focus on " Two Years of Lessons Learned ."

The UIG program began in the summer of 1997 when a set of issues was identified through meetings with the information resource management and program communities, a survey conducted by the **NYS Forum for Information Resource Management**, and recommendations from the CTG Standing Committee. CTG then held a kick off meeting to identify the problems public managers have in using government information to do their jobs. Some of those information use issues include:

- Lack of incentives to share
- Lack of understanding of the value of integrating data and using it to support decision making and planning
- Lack of understanding of the technical, human, and organizational requirements
- Lack of understanding of the real potential of the technology

From the information gathered, CTG developed **specific objectives in the UIG Program** to address these issues:

- Recommend policies or policy templates to guide public officials in their use of government information.
- Develop and assess data standards, inventories, and quality assurance tools.
- Develop and assess cost-benefit models and other measures of information value.
- Specify the information use skills necessary for government professionals and recommend ways to acquire them.
- Assess the cost-effectiveness of various technical tools and techniques.
- Develop collaborative and collective resources for data users.

The UIG investigations with New York state and local agencies are divided into two rounds; the first concluded in spring 1999 and the second will finish in the spring of 2000.

Round one project agencies were:

- Office of the NYS Comptroller, Division of Municipal Affairs
- Central New York Psychiatric Center
- NYS Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance, Bureau of Housing Services

Round two project agencies are:

- NYS Office of Real Property Services
- Office of the NYS Comptroller
- NYS Department of Transportation
- New York City Department of Information Technology and Telecommunications

When CTG began the UIG Program, we knew we'd encounter the following issues, which were demonstrated throughout the UIG projects.

- The evolving policy environment requires greater sharing of information among and within government agencies.
- The evolving technology environment makes it possible to bring together and share information in unprecedented ways.
- There are legal, regulatory, and political restraints on information sharing at all levels of government.
- Information rules may help identify such areas of concern as ownership or authority to release information,

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responsibility for stewardship of information, access to information vs. privacy rights, and fees vs. free use of information.