Issue Briefs (25)

Visualization Ready: Making Government Data More Useful
December 2017

Understanding and improving data flows produces significant savings, both in time and financial resources, by reducing duplication of efforts and streamlining the overall workflow. Using open data and adding visualizations to this process generates more use of the data by citizens and other stakeholders. It also helps identify trends and supports better decision making about programs and policies.

The IoT Challenge for Local Governments as Data Stewards
October 2016

The 'Internet of Things,' (IoT) is all around us, every day and everywhere. The uses across industries and sectors are seemingly endless and increasingly, local governments are taking notice and beginning to explore how they too might benefit. The big question local governments need to be asking themselves, is "are we prepared to steward the public's data in the context of IoT?" While there are some exceptions, we suspect that in many cases, the answer to that question is "no." Technology has evolved faster than the organizations trying to use them, and public policies lag farther still behind organizational change. All governments considering the IoT, in particular local governments who are already struggling with data stewardship responsibilities, should carefully consider three issues.

Mapping the boundaries of social media use in government: organizational, professional and personal
March 2016

The boundaries between interests and uses of social media appear relatively straightforward on paper, however, in practice, social media use by professionals in the workplace is often guided by different interests at difference times. This blurring of boundaries between interests and uses of social media by employees from organizational to professional to personal presents a set of challenges to government organizations, among others. As more and more government entities enter the world of social media, questions about employee access, acceptable use, employee conduct, and account management surface.

Six Lessons for Mayors
February 2015

Mayors, governors and other local government leaders are being inundated by all sorts of "experts" telling them how to make cities smarter. Becoming a critical consumer of information and perspectives of these experts is time intensive and challenging. The messages are often heartfelt and relevant to the problem, often they are not, but motivated by well-hidden, and in some cases, not so well hidden, commercial interests.

The opportunity and challenge of collecting street-level information
Wed, 19 Sep 2012

With the hope of changing the lives of youth in foster care, in 1999 the U.S. Congress enacted the Foster Care Independence Act, also known as the Chaffee Independent Living Act (Act). The Act provided $140 million in block grants to states to support youths' transitions to independent living and required the Federal Administration for Children and Families (ACF) to develop a national data collection and reporting system. The system, known as the National Youth in Transition Database (NYTD), seeks to track outcomes of youth receiving independent living services and to trace certain youth outcomes over time, even as they age out of the foster care system.

Collaborative Data Sharing Networks
Mon, 17 Sep 2012

Research and even business is becoming a collaborative enterprise that brings together multiple institutions, sectors and, increasingly, different countries. No where is this more apparent than in the natural sciences where the phenomenon being examined and questions being asked are not contained in the borders of one discipline, institution, country, or continent. Both a reason for and often the purpose of collaboration in the sciences is the need to amass, maintain, and share large and diverse structured data resources that no one research team or institution has the resources or expertise to collect, make available, and maintain.

Open Data and Fitness for Use: A Realistic Look
Mon, 17 Sep 2012

The basic assumption of the open data movement is that more intensive and creative use of information and technology can improve policy-making and generate new forms of public and economic value. Open data initiatives are focusing on education, public health, transportation, environmental stewardship, economic development, and many other areas. Ironically, this information is often treated as a black box in the open data movement. Stakeholders, analytical techniques, and technology tools all receive considerable attention, but the information itself is often seen as a given, used uncritically and trusted without examination. However, the very kind of data that is now being released as "open data" was actually collected or created for other purposes. It has undeniable potential value, but it also contains substantial risks for validity, relevance, and trust.

3-1-1 for Smarter Governments
Fri, 14 Sep 2012

Cities across the U.S. are joining in a global movement to improve the quality of their decision making and planning through increased access to data and by integrating collaborative approaches to making that data more accessible to government officials as well as the public. In many larger cities, 311 service centers are becoming a core driver to building capabilities for service integration. Since the first 311 hotline launched in 1996 in the City of Baltimore, 311 service centers have rapidly spread across the country. 311 systems are providing quick and easy access to non-emergency municipal services and information through a single, consolidated channel that extends from the three-digit toll-free dial number (3-1-1) to any possible means that people can use to communicate with their municipal government; email, text messaging, social media, and more recently smart phone applications.

Building Transnational Knowledge Networks to Tackle Global Problems
Fri, 12 Aug 2011

Sharing knowledge, information, technology and practices across cultural and national boundaries has become a means to address critical global problems. As governments strive to improve public health and safety, protect the environment, respond to disasters, or promote international commerce, they are engaging in new kinds of knowledge sharing networks as mechanisms for regional and global collaboration.

Delivering Public Value Through Open Government
Fri, 12 Aug 2011

The Obama Administration's Open Government Directive raised to prominence the principles of transparency, participation, and collaboration as "the cornerstone of an open government." What lies at the heart of the open government vision is broader access to government data and creating new opportunity for citizens to contribute expertise and perspectives to government decision making. What is not yet clear is what types of value can be delivered and to whom through transparency, participation, and collaboration focused initiatives. While these three open government principles resonate in familiar and positive ways, it is not obvious how government agencies can best create new systems and services organized around them and ultimately deliver desired and measurable benefits to government and non-government stakeholders.

Government Accountability Through Spending Transparency
Fri, 12 Aug 2011

Governments of the world are facing both national and global demands for greater levels of transparency that allow not only citizens but other nations to hold them accountable for their actions. These internal and external pressures and government responses have been fueled in part by innovations in information and communication

technologies (ICTs) and the expanding capabilities of governments to use technology effectively.

Government in a Mobile World
Fri, 12 Aug 2011

Government services, staff, and development efforts will be increasingly mobile in coming years as devices and applications continue to proliferate at an astounding rate. Industry experts stress how quickly the change is coming. The usual concerns that come with any technology innovation also accompany the mobile world: security, accessibility, privacy, development, deployment. As with any technology, mobile brings its own unique characteristics to these concerns. While critical for government, the single most important fact is that developments in the mobile world will directly impact nearly every aspect of government operations including delivery of services, citizen engagement, allocation of IT resources, staff support, and training.

Exploring Value in Social Media
Wed, 12 May 2010

In President Barack Obama's first day in office he issued a memorandum to federal agencies calling for the development of an Open Government Directive that focused on increasing transparency, collaboration, and participation. The directive requires agencies to take actions to expand access to government information, improve the quality of government information, create a culture of open government, and evolve policy in this direction. The directive points to "the use of new technologies," many of which are based on social media platforms, "to promote greater openness in government." Most recently, the administration issued a memorandum further encouraging the use of social media by clarifying that the Paper Reduction Act of 1995 "does not apply to many uses of such media and technologies."

Governance: The Value of a Custom Fit
Wed, 26 Aug 2009

Reduce costs, increase transparency and improve service quality: these goals are on the minds of chief information officers (CIOs) everywhere. Consolidation, centralization, and integration are recognized as strategies for achieving these goals, but these strategies require new information technology (IT) governance capability for making state-wide coordinated information technology decisions.

No Loss in Translation: Using XML Databases to Simplify and Streamline Processes
Mon, 03 Aug 2009

For over a decade, the simplicity, portability, and flexibility of XML have made it the accepted standard for formatting and sharing data via web services and service-oriented architecture (SOA). However, XML data that is easily transferred across machines and applications is not as easily stored and processed within those same machines and applications. As a result, the XML data is typically transformed into non-XML formats better suited for use within databases and applications. This transformation step adds a layer of complexity to the process.

Opening Government with Information
Mon, 01 Jun 2009

Open government is grounded in the belief that access to government information is essential to the functioning of democracy. In the United States, information-based strategies to promote open government began with the Constitutional rights to free speech and a free press, and later extended to public meetings laws that require government to conduct its business in open venues. In the 1960s, information-based strategies such as freedom of information laws further established the public's right to know and set the rules for gaining access to most government records. Efforts to broadly open government information began in the 1990s with the introduction of electronic government initiatives that turned the focus toward creating electronic access programs, electronic records programs, and thousands of government Web sites.

Mobile Technology in the Public Sector: It's more than just the laptop

Fri, 3 May 2008

One of the most difficult problems facing government managers who want to implement new technology is anticipating how it will affect work. Of course, the primary goal is to improve performance. However, it is nearly impossible to take into account all the human, organizational, and external influences that may impact how well that goal is achieved. Until the technology is put to work, planning is often little more than speculation. This is particularly true with mobile technology, which may have substantial potential, when combined with wireless networks, to expand the time, locations, and effectiveness of many types of government work. Fully exploiting this potential, however, presents a complex problem for government managers.

Regional Coordination: Exploring new response capability
Fri, 3 May 2008

A crisis rarely occurs in one jurisdiction or community; they tend to cross multiple geographic and organizational boundaries. The effects of the World Trade Center attacks, for example, extended far beyond New York City and the effects of Hurricane Katrina were felt far beyond the city of New Orleans. Events such as these continue to generate new insights into the coordination across boundaries necessary to ensure effective response to incidents—both natural and man-made.

The Performance Measurement Puzzle
Thu, 2 May 2008

There is a simple and persuasive proposition that is quite common in government policy and practice: better measurements of performance will lead to overall improvements in government. That proposition is fundamental to any notion of governing as rational decision making, from at least as far back as the Program Planning and Budgeting Systems (PPBS) and government accountability movements in the 1960's, up to the emergence of ComStat-style programs currently operating in many agencies. Performance measurement is central as well to the President's Management Agenda for improving U.S. federal agency operations, and many similar initiatives that can be found in state agencies. In spite of this long history of concern with performance measurement, however, it remains a puzzling problem for governments at all levels.

A Capability-based View of Government IT Innovation
Wed, 1 May 2008

The obvious difficulty and high failure rate of information technology (IT) innovations in government and elsewhere have been central concerns in much of CTG's work over the past 15 years. Our first-hand experiences, coupled with reviews of the current research, highlight the importance of organizational capability as a critical success factor in IT innovation. It is clear that successful IT innovations, and the transformation they seek to support, depend at least as much on how well the organizations and individuals perform as on the chips, networks, and software. This finding led us, in turn, to further explore the concept of organizational capability and to work with government agencies to develop tools to enhance capability for IT innovation.

Collaboration and Information Sharing: Two Critical Capabilities for Government
Sat, 05 May 2007

Information is one of the most valuable resources of government. Government managers, however, are finding that the information needed to plan, make decisions, and act is often held outside their own organizations, collected for widely different purposes, and maintained in disparate formats. As a consequence, governments around the world are increasingly turning to information sharing as a strategy for maximizing the value of information in providing services and responding to problems. New practices are emerging at all levels; from town governments creating performance-based management capability by sharing information between departments such as police and highway, to state-level efforts to coordinate public safety practices, to national efforts responding to public health crises.

Advancing Return on Investment Analysis for Government IT: A Public Value Framework
Fri, 04 May 2007

Every investment decision requires a leap of faith—sometimes a large one—into an uncertain future. However, after decades of investments in information technology (IT), running into billions of dollars, governments worldwide are largely unable to convincingly demonstrate a return on investment (ROI) that is widely understood or based upon well-grounded measures. While most can agree that government has been dramatically changed by IT, and many programs and services are more effective and less expensive as a result, government agencies are finding it increasingly difficult to communicate the public benefits of these investments.

Tools for Enabling the Next Stage of e-Government
Wed, 02 May 2007

As e-government advances beyond the early stages of basic information access and simple interactions toward active engagement of citizens and agencies, the tools enabling this progression will be those that promote networking and collaboration while addressing issues of data portability, reusability, and longevity. The flow of information will be the focus as government adapts to new demands for sharing, accessing, and distributing information.

Internationalizing Digital Government Research
Tue, 01 May 2007

For most of us, the idea of "government" is linked to a particular place. We associate government with a town hall, state house, or capital city and with the laws and policies that apply to the people and organizations located within a specific piece of political geography. Your local government provides fire protection, your state issues professional licenses, the national government defines what it means to be a citizen of your country. At the same time, we recognize that governmental jurisdictions and programs often overlap within a single country. Think about taxation structures, emergency services, transportation networks, and schools as just a few examples.

Managing and Preserving State Government Digital Information
Sun, 17 Sep 2006

All signs point to continued growth in the volume and complexity of "born digital" government information. However, most states are hampered in their efforts to respond to this growth by a combination of technology, policy, political, and management issues, complicated by fragmented organizational roles and responsibilities for managing and preserving digital information. While traditional information and records custodians agree that not all digital information produced by government is worth saving, all agree that a small portion of this material is of permanent legal, legislative, or cultural value. In addition, a much larger portion has short and medium term value to CIOs, state and local agencies, the private sector, and citizens for purposes of e-government, e-commerce, and day-to-day government administration. To address these challenges, traditional information and records custodians and other key stakeholders, such as chief information officers (CIOs), need to reorient strategies toward sharing information and assets and understanding common- alities rather than emphasizing differences. It is time to move beyond debates over terminology and start treating digital information as a "public asset" with multiple values to both government and society.