

## **Developing a Successful E-Government Strategy**

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### **Introduction**

Electronic government (e-government), the ability for government to provide access to services and information twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week, is an emerging force today. In the aftermath of a successful Y2K rollover, government is turning attention and resources to providing information and services on-line, exploring digital democracy, and using technology for economic development. As a result, government service will be revolutionized as we progress into the Digital Age. In this new age, good government is accessible government. Good government correlates to immediate access to pertinent information. Good government is faster, cheaper and more efficient.

Government Technology, a leading US publication for government technology professionals, suggests that e-government is actually a revolution in governance that will cause a dramatic shift in the way that political and social power are organized and used. If this assertion is true, then government will not only change, but citizens and the way they relate to government will also change as a result of this revolution. Government has the opportunity to be a part of or even lead this revolution or become its victim through complacency, failure to move quickly, or inattention to the drivers that are forcing change.

The desire to transform government has not escaped the vendor community and many companies are capitalizing on this initiative. Since the beginning of 2000, more than sixty US companies have entered the e-government market space. This explosion of available products and services can be overwhelming and confusing to organizations that are not prepared to take advantage of these offerings. It is important for each organization to define e-government for itself and its community, and to develop a strategy to move forward – at Internet speed.

### **Definition of E-Government**

Establishing a definition of e-government for the organization is the first step in developing an overall strategy. While this definition may be slightly different for each organization based on the community's values, goals and culture, it is important to understand that e-government is much more than a website, electronic mail (e-mail), or processing transactions via the Internet. While many of today's e-government vendors narrowly focus their product and service offerings in these areas, organizations that overlook the broad implications of e-government will not realize its true benefits and will be ill prepared to serve the emerging digital citizenry.

Public Technology, Incorporated, a non-profit technology research and development organization for local government, has identified three key areas they believe should be addressed by e-government. These areas are service provision, digital democracy, and economic development. The City and County of San Francisco (San Francisco) has included these three key areas as part of their definition of e-government.

The first area, service provision, includes public access to all services and information, as appropriate or legally allowable, twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week. In the early stages, electronic service provision should be considered only one of several methods of doing business with government. Many members of the public and businesses will desire to continue to conduct business via more traditional methods including in-person and over the telephone. Examples of possible e-government service initiatives are included in Table 1. These services include a variety of interactions including those between government and its citizens, businesses, and other government agencies.

The second key area included in a broad definition of e-government is the concept of digital democracy. While this term has been around for some time, its meaning and impact have yet to be realized. While the use of e-mail to correspond with elected officials is rising in the US, voting via the Internet, electronic government forums, and participation in government meetings through the use of teleconferencing technology represent more advanced forms of digital democracy. These initiatives can radically change how the public interacts with government by increasing participation and the level of knowledge that citizens have about government.

The use of technology to support economic development, the third key area, represents new territory for many governments. Forward thinking governments realize that economic viability is becoming more dependent upon access to information and the use of technology to improve service delivery. As government goes global with the rest of society, the role of technology in economic development will increase. Imagine a company, thousands of miles away, electronically visiting a jurisdiction in another country to conduct a virtual tour of the area to identify potential sites for establishing a physical presence. Imagine further that this virtual tour provides walk throughs of potential sites and buildings, and the ability to drill down to very detailed information related to infrastructure, cost, and other demographics of the area.

These three key areas, service provision, digital democracy, and economic development, represent a broad definition of e-government and affect all customers of local government, including interactions between government and the public (G2P), government and business (G2B), government and other government agencies (G2G), and between government and its own employees (G2E). While many current efforts focus on G2P, the three remaining areas can provide tremendous payback for government. A definition of e-government is not complete unless it identifies and considers all of its customers.

## **Development of an E-Government Strategy**

Once e-government is defined, local government can move into the next stage, development of an e-government strategy. This strategy is fundamental to navigating through the exploding e-government market place, re-engineering processes and procedures to support e-government, and implementing e-government initiatives. Government is quickly realizing that this strategy must be enterprise-wide to most effectively and efficiently serve the digital society. This strategy should include:

- The organization's definition of e-government that includes key areas to be addressed and identification of all customers;
- A vision that is easily understood and succinctly expresses the organization's concept of and plans for e-government;
- Specific goals and objectives that can be monitored and measured;
- Identification of policies necessary to support e-government;
- A methodology for determining organizational readiness;
- A process for identifying and prioritizing e-government initiatives; and
- A business model to sustain e-government initiatives.

## **Critical Success Factors**

To develop its e-government strategy, San Francisco has assembled a small group of high level employees with enterprise-wide responsibilities. This group, also known as the E-government Strategy Group, has identified ten factors they believe are critical to the success of e-government initiatives. These factors are summarized in Table 2 and address organizational readiness and governing policies and practices.

The critical success factors related to organizational readiness are focused around three key drivers: the process, the people, and the technology. First, it is important to ensure that processes are reviewed and re-engineered where necessary to support a new way of doing business. As with any application of technology, business process review should be performed, streamlining opportunities should be identified, processes and procedures should be improved, and solutions should be designed around these improved processes. The second driver, the people, relates to having an adequate level of well-trained people to both support and use these systems. The third driver of organizational readiness, the technology, focuses on assessment of the current infrastructure, identification of improvements needed to support e-government initiatives, implementation of those improvements, and integration of existing autonomous systems and between new and legacy systems, with a focus on providing a total solution. Implementation of a uniform messaging standard, adequate bandwidth, and reliable, redundant networks are examples of critical infrastructure requirements that support e-government initiatives.

The critical success factors related to governing policies and practices necessarily focus around processes. Most importantly, an organization must have an enterprise approach to e-government that is adhered to by all facets of the organization. This approach can include policies as fundamental as having a single portal for the organization, i.e. an official website, developing standards for a consistent look and feel for all interfaces, using a single credit card processing service, and integrating applications where ever possible. This approach should also include a design philosophy for all interfaces that is organized around service from the customer's perspective, not based on the organizational structure. Customers should not be required to be knowledgeable of or understand the government structure to access information and services.

Development of a marketing and communications plan should also be included in the e-government strategy. While government may not traditionally perform these functions, they are vital to adoption of e-government initiatives. Both the marketing and communications plan must address all customers of government services. This part of the strategy should also include policy recommendations regarding advertising and commercial use of the government's official web portal.

The e-government strategy should also include a business model and sustainable funding plan. Government can internally develop their own e-government solutions, procure solutions with or without integration services, outsource the entire effort, or select a business model that combines these options. Government also has many funding options including self-funding these initiatives on a pay-as-you-go basis, bond or other financing, charging transaction fees, and partnering with third party providers. Again government can combine these options in a variety of fashions. It is important to consider that while many on-line transactions can generate revenue and/or reduce costs, other important services will not have these results but may still be important to the organization or community. While advertising on and commercial use of the government web portal offer opportunities for revenue generation, these practices invite a host of legal issues for government to consider.

Another important aspect of an e-government strategy is identification of risks and methods to minimize them especially in the areas of privacy and security. While one of the goals of e-government is to provide access to information, it is important to determine which information is appropriately and, more importantly, legally disclosable. Additionally, the very nature of the Internet introduces risk into e-government initiatives that utilize it.

While standards are still emerging, a plan for access by all facets of society is an important aspect of an e-government strategy. This part of the strategy should address access for people with disabilities, as well as, multi-lingual access. Additionally, this part of the strategy should address issues of access for disadvantaged segments of society.

The sheer number of possible e-government initiatives requires that government create a process for determining priorities. Criteria can include availability of funding, chance of success, return on investment, readiness of the function/service, and customer demand. Surveying the public and businesses regarding their preferences for e-government applications is one way to determine which applications should be prioritized the highest. Additionally, initial efforts should include projects in each of the three key areas, provision of service, digital democracy, and economic development.

## **Conclusion**

The information presented in this document is the result of work done to date by San Francisco's E-government Strategy Group. It attempts to outline the requirements for developing a successful e-government strategy at the macro level. The details of each e-government strategy will be specific to the organization. Beginning with defining e-government for the organization and ending with development of a methodology to determine priorities, an organization's e-government strategy must be customized to most successfully serve the organization and its customers.

With the dawning of the Digital Age and the societal changes caused by it, government is being pressed to enter the e-age. The explosion of e-government product offerings and growing interest from the community and government officials magnifies this pressure. Government does not have the option to ignore the e-government phenomenon and continue to do business as usual.

Done correctly, the goals of e-government can be realized and the public can go on-line instead waiting in line to obtain information and services.

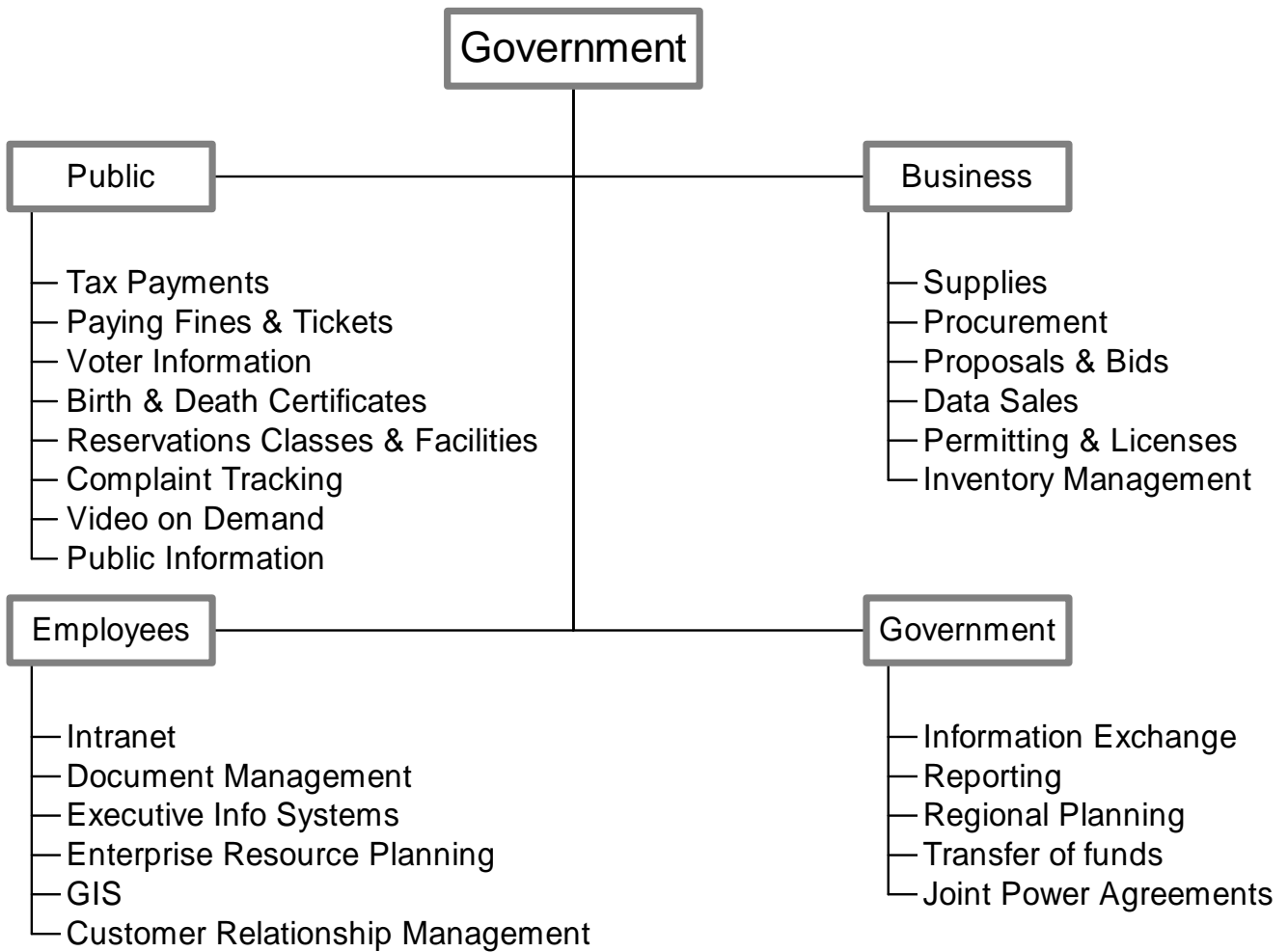


Table 1 – Examples of e-Government Services

<b>Organizational Readiness</b>
1. Robust, reliable infrastructure to support e-government initiatives.
2. Integration of autonomous systems and between new systems and legacy applications.
3. Process review and re-engineering that ensures technology is applied to good, streamlined processes.
4. Adequate resources for long-term support of e-government initiatives both in the IT department and within other departments.
<b>Governing Policies and Practices</b>
5. An enterprise approach that is followed by all facets of the organization including a single portal organized around services, which provides a consistent look and feel.
6. A marketing and communications plan.
7. A business model and plan for sustainable funding.
8. Identification of risks and methods to minimize them especially in the areas of privacy and security.
9. A plan for access by all facets of society including access for people with disabilities, addressing the digital divide, and multi-lingual access.
10. A process for identifying e-government initiatives and establishing priorities.

Table 2 – Critical Success Factors for E-Government