



E-Government Strategies

TOOLS TO ENHANCE COMMUNITY POLICING

by Ari Schwartz and Cynthia Wong

INTRODUCTION

E-Government involves using information and communications technology (ICT) to enhance the relationship between the government and its constituents.¹ Developing “citizen-centric” models that involve stakeholders inside and out of government is the key to real e-Government reform. When effectively implemented, e-Government transforms existing processes by fostering transparency, eliminating distance and other divides, and empowering people to participate in the political processes that affect their lives.

E-Government projects present unique opportunities to strengthen community policing efforts. ICT tools for collaboration, discussion, and problem solving can enhance communication between neighborhoods and local police by providing new avenues to share information unconstrained by distance and time. In turn, increased information flow facilitates collaborative problem solving by helping police identify community issues, eliminating barriers to collective action, and leveraging untapped local capacity. As the following sections demonstrate, integrating e-Government projects as part of a larger, more traditional community policing strategy has the potential to provide a variety of benefits to both police and residents.

THREE PHASES OF E-GOVERNMENT²

E-Government is an evolutionary, multi-faceted process that we may view as consisting of a set of phases. One way of conceptualizing these phases is in three parts: publish, transact,

¹ E-Government may be conceptualized in many different ways. One report defines e-Government as “the use of ICT to promote more efficient and effective government, facilitate more accessible government services, allow greater public access to information, and make government more accountable to citizens.” The Working Group on E-Government in the Developing World, “Roadmap for E-Government in the Developing World,” (2001), 1, available at <http://www.pacificcouncil.org/pdfs/e-gov.paper.f.pdf>. Other groups focus on the potential of e-Government to strengthen civic engagement and other democratic goals. See, e.g., E-Democracy.Org, www.e-democracy.org (last accessed July 28, 2006).

² See the Center for Democracy and Technology, “The E-Government Handbook for Developing Countries,” (2002), 3–5, available at www.cdt.org/egov/handbook/2002-11-14egovhandbook.pdf. See also the Council for Excellence in Government, “e-Government: The Next American Revolution,” (2001), available at www.excelgov.org/admin/FormManager/filesuploading/bpnt4c.pdf.

and interact. Although interact and transact applications require more sophisticated back-end capabilities, some e-Government projects have components of more than one phase, and all three phases can be implemented simultaneously. This conceptual framework for understanding the process of e-Government development is applicable from the police beat all the way to the governance of federal programs.

Publish

Publish sites seek to disseminate information *about* government and information compiled *by* government to as wide an audience as possible. The quality of publish Web sites depends on the amount of content, the usefulness of the content, and how often content is updated. Web site quality also depends on factors such as navigability, usability, search capacity, accessibility, and download time. Even more advanced portal applications enable residents to personalize content based on their individual needs and interests. For example, community policing portals can publish crime data by neighborhood and link to other city service information that is of value to people in their daily lives. Such customizable portals would enhance the value of online community policing and encourage wider use because they support diverse segments of the community.

Local governments and police departments generate huge volumes of information, much of it potentially useful to individuals and businesses. The Internet and other advanced communications technologies can bring this information quickly and more directly to citizens. Publish implementations of e-Government diverge widely in their design and content, but governments at any level can generally start the process of e-Government by publishing government information online, beginning with rules and regulations, government documents, event calendars, and forms. Police departments can publish crime data, news alerts, safety tips, and information about penitentiary and parolee releases. Advanced publish features can also disseminate content to cell phones and PDAs.³ Finally, police departments can easily link community policing portals to other city departments that deal with related quality of life services (e.g., vehicle tow information or public housing rules).

Publish projects are often thought of as basic building blocks for larger e-Government programs, but the release of vital information to the community, even if only for the purpose of building transparency and mutual trust, can have a profound impact on stakeholder views of government.

Transact

A transact Web site offers a direct link to government services, available at any time. Perhaps the biggest incentive for city and police departments to use and provide ICT services is to streamline currently bureaucratic and labor-intensive procedures, which can save money and increase productivity in the long run. Successful transact projects target those services that

³ Many label this practice as mobile government or “m-Government.” For example, Japan offers m-Government services through its e-Government portal at www.e-gov.go.jp (accessed July 26, 2006). The National Policy Agency of Japan disseminates photos of wanted suspects through cell phones. The Hong Kong government is also developing a range of new m-Government initiatives. “E-Government in Hong Kong,” <http://www.info.gov.hk/digital21/e-gov/eng/init/mgov.htm> (accessed July 26, 2006).

residents have an immediate use for while also addressing the concerns of government workers whose role will change because of the innovation. In addition, officials should integrate transact initiatives with process reform by streamlining processes before launching them online.

Transact sites can enhance productivity by making processes that require government assistance or approval simpler, faster, and cheaper. For example, some police departments currently allow individual and business users to input and track neighborhood problems online. In turn, the police link this new functionality to the 311 system and other city services.⁴ Moreover, police departments could also allow users to submit routine incidence reports for “suspectless” crimes (e.g., bicycle theft or vandalism) directly through department Web sites.⁵ Local governments often consolidate these initiatives and create a portal for all transact services.

Interact

Interactive e-Government involves two-way communications. Governments use e-Participation projects to collect citizens’ and businesses’ views so constituent interests and needs are better represented in government programs and police initiatives. The goal is to increase the responsiveness of city departments to citizens and businesses based on those submissions. E-Participation starts with basic functions like providing e-mail contact information for government officials and police officers or simple feedback forms. Other tools include chat rooms, online surveys, electronic newsletters, and e-mail lists. Online community policing sites can provide tools for virtual beat meetings, web tip systems, neighborhood canvassing, social service agency referrals, neighborhood beat blogs, and feedback forms for police complaints or compliments. E-Participation applications may also have a publish feature, presenting relevant background information, decisions, and other materials to help citizens and businesses understand certain public policy or crime issues. These applications can then enable public comment on policymaking by breaking down complex policy issues. More advanced e-Participation functionality can include the ability of an individual to personalize Web pages or sites to meet one’s needs.

This phase of e-Government may also include the creation of citizen or government forums. Forums facilitate communication among individuals who, while living in the same neighborhood, may not otherwise interact because of time constraints or physical accessibility. E-Consultation takes the process one step further than e-Participation, facilitating online comment on a specific policy or police program while the issues are under active consideration by the government. For all projects, it is important that local officials show citizens that their engagement matters by informing them of the outcomes of their online comments.

⁴ Many cities already allow residents to submit requests for a variety of city services online. See, e.g., “311 At Your Service – City of Chicago,” https://servicerequest.cityofchicago.org/web_intake_chic/Controller (accessed July 28, 2006); “e-Services – Online Services – District of Columbia,” http://dc.gov/more_services.asp?tab=0&category=services (accessed July 28, 2006).

⁵ The San Francisco Police Department (SFPD) began receiving crime reports for minor offenses online in 2004. As of April 2006, the SFPD has seen both an increase in crime reporting and an increase in time available to officers to respond to emergency calls, conduct preventive patrols, and interact with the community. Beth Winegarner, “Police Say Online Crime Reporting Saves Officers Time,” *The Examiner*, April 17, 2006.

Finally, local governments may consider hosting independent, citizen-initiated forums and neighborhood e-mail lists by providing technical infrastructure and support while allowing communities themselves to create and manage content. To ensure that a diversity of voices are represented, governments and local police departments should promote the availability of the forums both on community policing Web sites and at neighborhood beat meetings. Reserving space solely for community use helps build trust by allowing communities to identify, frame, and clarify issues independent of city officials.⁶ Such forums constitute online communities where people can exchange ideas, broaden public awareness of issues, and establish new opportunities for activism constrained neither by time nor distance.

In the law enforcement context, increasing and enhancing communication between neighborhoods and local police strengthens civic engagement and contributes to building public trust in law enforcement. In turn, increased participation and community buy-in greatly boost the effectiveness of community policing efforts. However, it is important to note that interact projects are also the most likely to fail because a critical mass of participants is necessary to make them work.⁷ Local governments and police departments should engage citizens collaboratively in the design phase and be proactive about soliciting participation by promoting interact projects using traditional media.

TRANSFORMING GOVERNMENTS THROUGH E-GOVERNANCE

E-Government is about transforming the way government interacts with the governed. That process requires a coherent strategy, beginning with an examination of a community's political will, resources, regulatory environment, and the ability of the community to make use of planned technologies. There is no-one-size-fits-all strategy, but we have identified five essential elements in the transformation process.

Planning for Process Reform⁸

Successful e-Government is about the creation of new processes and new relationships between government and its constituents. Often, the business world launches new e-Commerce products and changes the administration and bureaucracy around the growth of the site. Government is rarely as flexible. E-Government initiatives are likely to have the wid-

⁶ See "Local Issues Forum Guidebook," E-Democracy.Org UK – Issues Forum 14–17, 52–57 (March 2005), available at <http://e-democracy.org/uk/guide.pdf>. E-Democracy recommends that creators of local issues forums maintain a political buffer between issues forum administrators and government bodies to lend greater legitimacy and transparency to the process. See also Keith Hampton and Barry Wellman, "Neighboring in Netville: How the Internet Supports Community and Social Capital in a Wired Suburb," *City & Community* 4, no. 2 (2003): 16–26, <http://www.asanet.org/galleries/default-file/HamptonWellmanCC.pdf> (accessed July 13, 2007).

⁷ E-Democracy emphasizes the importance of recruitment efforts to establish a critical mass of participants to sustain a discussion and prevent online ghost towns. Interview by Italian Polix.it with Steven Clift, E-Democracy (October 16, 2001), available at <http://www.mail-archive.com/do-wire@tc.umn.edu/msg00364.html>. See also "Neighboring in Netville," which examines one case study that found that a local e-mail forum enhanced neighborhood ties and facilitated discussion and mobilization around local issues. However, the case study also suggests that the ability of the network to provide new affordances for community ties depended on the network's "always-on" nature and universal access to the list.

⁸ Accenture considers process reform (or "service transformation") as the 4th phase of e-Government. Accenture characterizes this phase of e-Government as a period of wider integration and organizational changes across departments. The focus of e-Government shifts to wide scale improvements in Customer Relation Management. Accenture, "eGovernment Leadership: Engaging the Customer," (2003), 6–10, https://www.accenture.com/NR/rdonlyres/9988450E-C3A2-4094-875B-CA4F1E3F3696/0/engaging_customer.pdf.

est impact when pursued within the context of broader strategies for governmental reform, improved access to ICT, and community development. This revolutionary change takes advanced planning to bring success.

Leadership

To achieve the e-Government transformation, elected officials and administrators who understand the technology and the policy goals involved, and who will push for reform, are needed at all levels of government. Project champions must articulate a sense of purpose that can propel the e-Government initiative through all the necessary steps. As police departments and city agencies adopt new methods of collaboration and organization, this unifying theme will ensure the cooperation of disparate factions and the long-term commitment of resources and expertise. Project leaders can help ensure success if they elevate the public profile of their vision and press for its effective implementation by tying it to broader community goals. Many successful e-Government initiatives have been spearheaded by a dedicated office with high-level support.

Strategic Investment

Governments will need to prioritize programs to maximize available funds in view of tightly limited resources. This requires the formulation of concise objectives for each program and an explicit route to reach those objectives. Projects should have clear value in terms of enhancing transparency, increasing citizen participation in community policing, cutting bureaucratic red tape or saving money. Administrators must establish standards and benchmarks to measure the relative success of these projects.

Collaboration

City governments and police departments will have to explore new relationships among agencies and departments. Agencies may have to overcome traditional reluctance to work with each other to maximize benefits of scale in e-Government projects. In addition, police departments should develop partnerships with the private sector, community-based organizations, and residents to ensure quality and accessibility of community policing e-Government projects.

Civic Engagement

Community involvement and empowerment are key components of any successful community policing initiative. To develop a strong citizen- and community-focused vision, policy makers must keep the ordinary citizen and target community in mind when designing e-Government initiatives. Policy makers should encourage all stakeholders to participate in defining what their shared vision of e-Government should accomplish within a community policing program. Once leaders in government clearly define that vision, they must communicate it across all sectors, not just to those who will implement it.

CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES⁹

Once governments commit to strategies that will transform their governance processes, significant challenges and opportunities will often arise during their implementation. We have identified several considerations that policy makers must address in the design and implementation of any e-Government initiative:

- *Interoperability*: Rather than adding new systems on top of outmoded legacy systems, e-Government planners should develop systems and formats that work together and across departments.
- *Records management*: Governments have unique needs in the field of records management. New technologies are being created to help manage information and policy makers should take advantage of these new technologies accordingly.
- *Permanent availability*: Policy makers should design applications with preservation and documentation in mind while also taking into account issues of relevancy, usability, privacy, and security.
- *Education and marketing*: Education and outreach programs will be needed to ensure community and citizen participation. Policy makers should also conduct research to ensure that online services respond to actual needs and that the implementation suits the target audience.
- *Public/private competition/collaboration*: Policy makers should consider cooperative projects between the public and private sectors carefully. Public and private interests should work together as partners and not necessarily for political or economic gain. New partnerships and alliances can have unforeseen consequences, so it is important to review such relationships frequently to ensure that both parties are pleased with the arrangement.
- *Workforce issues*: Human resources must be structured and managed with e-Government goals in mind. Because ICT implementations of community policing initiatives require collaboration across city departments, civil servants and police officers need training and leadership to integrate themselves into the new information structure.
- *Cost structures*: While planning and budgeting in a changing climate is difficult, governments should seek to invest in sustainable programs that can produce savings. Policy makers should articulate functionalities and goals clearly to ensure that they are attainable with available resources.
- *Benchmarking*: Governments must regularly evaluate the progress and effectiveness of their e-Government investments to determine whether programs are meeting stated goals and objectives on schedule.
- *Public policy and law*: Policy makers implementing e-Government programs must consider the impact of existing law and public policy. This effort must incorporate a

⁹ See e-Government: The Next American Revolution at 6–16. See also E-Government Handbook at 11–22.

- review of current practices that encompasses more than just law and policy related to the use of technology. Old policies and overlapping authority can greatly complicate a project. Administrators may have to adopt new policy directives before collaborative online initiatives can function smoothly.
- *Digital divide, disability access, literacy and e-Literacy:* Even in areas where access to technological infrastructure is nearly ubiquitous, there are still marginalized groups who are unable to make use of ICTs. Programs must take special steps to include people who are not e-literate and to bridge the digital divide, including education and outreach to vulnerable groups who are traditionally isolated from technology. For example, policy makers should design online services with appropriate interfaces for people of all physical abilities.
 - *Privacy:* Privacy is one of the most important issues facing the Internet. Governments must be responsible custodians of the enormous amounts of personal information they hold. Government Web sites and online services must adhere to privacy best practices. Policy makers should integrate these practices during the planning and design phases of any e-Government initiative.
 - *Security:* Security must be addressed in the design phase because security breaches can shatter public trust in e-Government efforts. Without trust, citizens will not use online services that could potentially place their personal privacy or security at risk.
 - *Transparency:* Government and police department transparency should be embedded in the design of ICT systems. When citizens and communities do not understand how decisions are made, they are less likely to participate actively in problem-solving efforts.

CONCLUSION

The principles of e-Government can be applicable to online community policing efforts. The process of picking projects that are right for the community and developing them to transform the way that stakeholders interact with government is becoming a more established process. In particular, engaging stakeholders throughout this effort will be essential for local law enforcement to develop projects that truly improve the community and their interactions with their government.

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