



# DIGITAL COUNTIES SURVEY

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

**Center for Digital Government's Report from the  
2008 Digital Counties Survey**

©2008. All Rights Reserved.

Underwritten by:



**Microsoft**

**OnBase**  
a World Software solution

Produced by:

**CENTER FOR  
DIGITAL  
GOVERNMENT**  
www.centerdigitalgov.com

The National Association of Counties (NACo) and the Center for Digital Government, in association with *Government Technology* magazine and the Digital Communities program, recently completed the sixth annual Digital Counties Survey. This survey forms a vital component of the longest running suite of national surveys of government information technology (IT) initiatives. These are conducted each year to benchmark excellence and innovation in the public sector's use of IT. Increasingly, survey results are used in strategic planning by a growing number of jurisdictions as well as for research by public-policy think tanks. They also frequently receive editorial coverage from major media outlets, including *The Wall Street Journal*, *USA Today* and *The New York Times*.

This year's Digital Counties Survey was underwritten by Hyland Software, developers of OnBase, Microsoft and CDW-G Corp.

In broad terms, the Digital Counties Survey seeks to forward three basic objectives:

1. To identify and document how counties are using technology to transform service delivery and internal operations;
2. To identify emerging or best practices implemented by counties; and
3. To recognize those counties that use technology to offer a high level of service to their citizens and provide a model for other jurisdictions.

All U.S. county governments are invited to participate in the survey and respondents are grouped in one of four categories. This year, the counties participating in the survey are divided into these four population categories:

- Less than 150,000 – 23 percent
- 150,000 to 249,999 – 19 percent
- 250,000 to 499,999 – 28 percent
- 500,000 or more – 30 percent

In each of these population categories, the top 10 counties are adjudicated based on how comprehensive and innovative their IT programs are in support of government operations, as well as serving citizens and businesses. Specifically, in the 2008 survey, 19 questions and more than 100 data points probed the extent of:

1. Implementation and adoption of online service delivery;
2. The planning and governance that makes the transformation to digital government possible;
3. The infrastructure and architecture that also makes the transformation possible; and
4. Through an open-ended section that allowed counties to discuss their initiatives in their own words, community broadband, organization and structure data and citizen engagement.

In recognition of the hard work and innovation of the best governments this year, the survey's top digital counties were honored at an awards ceremony at NACo's national conference in Kansas City, Mo., in July 2008. There, Center for Digital Government Executive Vice President Cathilea Robinett said, "The Digital Counties Survey continues to document the technological progress and innovation of county governments. Improved service to citizens and more efficient use of government resources are the results."

NACo Executive Director Larry E. Naake added, "We are seeing county governments utilizing the efficiencies of technology to deliver services to Americans. Across a broad spectrum of service delivery needs and budgetary challenges, counties continue to develop improved service delivery options made possible by technology."

## 2008 Winners

The top 10 counties in each category have achieved a higher total score than their contenders. This is interpreted to indicate that they have accomplished a fuller implementation of the benchmarks represented in the questions. This serves as an overall indication of the level to which their information technology programs are comprehensive and innovative.

### TOP 10 DIGITAL COUNTIES BY POPULATION

#### ► 500,000 or more:

- 1st:** San Diego County, Calif.
- 2nd:** Anne Arundel County, Md. (tie)
- 2nd:** Oakland County, Mich. (tie)
- 3rd:** Fairfax County, Va.
- 4th:** Westchester County, N.Y.
- 5th:** King County, Wash. (tie)
- 5th:** Orange County, Fla. (tie)
- 6th:** Sacramento County, Calif.
- 7th:** Tulsa County, Okla.
- 8th:** Montgomery County, Md. (tie)
- 8th:** Wake County, N.C. (tie)
- 9th:** Prince George County, Md.
- 10th:** Orange County, Calif.

#### ► 250,000 to 499,999:

- 1st:** Loudoun County, Va.
- 2nd:** Richland County, S.C.
- 3rd:** Dakota County, Minn.
- 4th:** Howard County, Md.
- 5th:** Placer County, Calif.
- 6th:** Prince William County, Va.
- 7th:** Douglas County, Colo. (tie)
- 7th:** Hamilton County, Ind. (tie)
- 8th:** Dutchess County, N.Y.
- 9th:** Washtenaw County, Mich.
- 10th:** Utah County, Utah

#### ► 150,000 to 249,999:

- 1st:** Frederick County, Md.
- 2nd:** Roanoke County, Va.
- 3rd:** Scott County, Iowa
- 4th:** Doña Ana County, N.M.
- 5th:** Yuma County, Ariz.
- 6th:** Racine County, Wis.
- 7th:** Peoria County, Ill.
- 8th:** Cumberland County, Pa.
- 9th:** Leon County, Fla.
- 10th:** Ottawa County, Mich.

#### ► Less than 150,000:

- 1st:** Charles County, Md.
- 2nd:** Stearns County, Minn.
- 3rd:** Nevada County, Calif.
- 4th:** Boone County, Mo.
- 5th:** Skagit County, Wash. (tie)
- 5th:** Gloucester County, Va. (tie)
- 6th:** Olmsted County, Minn.
- 7th:** Geauga County, Ohio (tie)
- 7th:** Randolph County, N.C. (tie)
- 8th:** Napa County, Calif.
- 9th:** Albemarle County, Va.
- 10th:** Delaware County, Ohio (tie)
- 10th:** Sutter County, Calif. (tie)

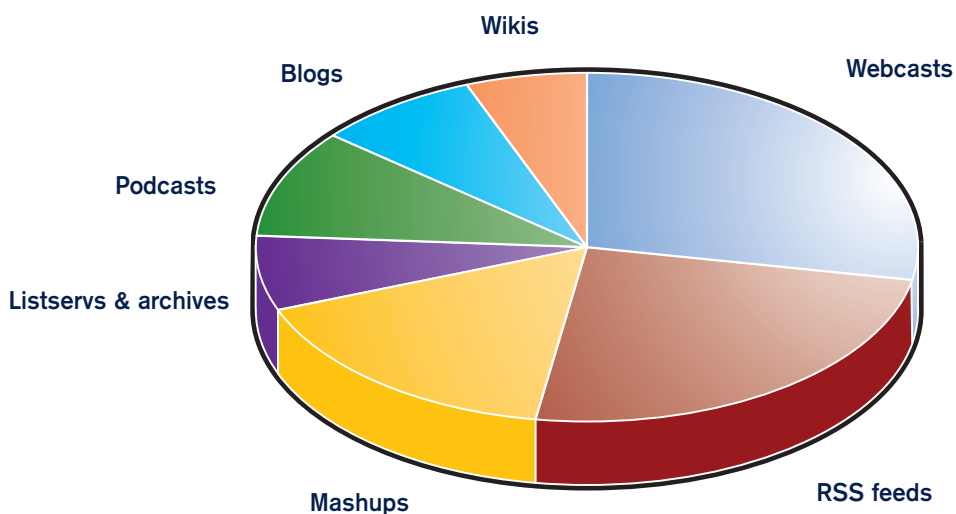
## OVERALL TREND ANALYSIS

In looking at the combined survey results from different population categories, this year's survey documented a continuing trend of increased online transactions, citizen participation opportunities, transparency and an expanding use of webcasts and blogs on county Web sites.

### Online Self-Service

- 100 percent of respondents have Web sites and 87 percent have portals with transactions
- 59 percent have webcasts that feature streamed audio and video, live and archived, including civic cable channel
- 47 percent have RSS feeds
- 37 percent have mashups in which government-held data — such as school performance, crime statistics and home sales — are automatically plotted on an online mapping utility
- 20 percent have list servs and their archives
- 19 percent have podcasts
- 16 percent have blogs
- 9 percent have wikis
- Average online transmissions are up from 16 percent in 2003 to 30 percent
- Tax filing and payment is the service most implemented at 54 percent, followed by property assessment and tax information at 40 percent and county records request at 37 percent

A breakdown of the range of online services utilizing newer information technologies can be seen in the following graph:



Of course, not all interactions with citizens can be conducted online. The use of Web services by constituents is underscored by what we describe as the current delivery channel mix. In other words, how are citizens and government employees accessing the county's IT services?

The majority of services are delivered online by more than one-third of the responding counties (34 percent), and nearly half the respondents also use interactive voice response (IVR) systems, kiosks and call centers.

### **Citizen Participation and Government Transparency Online**

As noted by Marilyn Gittell, professor of political science at the Graduate School and University Center of the City University of New York, "The experience of self-government in the U.S. is centered in two institutions: local government and civil society. The strong tradition of local government is directly related to the fear of a potentially tyrannical central state. Jefferson idealized the access to local government and the participation of the educated citizen in it as intrinsic to democracy. Participation in elections in a larger representative political system, the Republic, was only one aspect of citizenship. Local governments were the source of community identification and more responsive to felt public needs — and therefore a more direct vehicle for citizen engagement." <sup>1</sup>

As mentioned, the continuing growth of citizen participation opportunities and transparency through the Web is a significant trend, one that is vital for the health of our democratic institutions. Of particular note:

- 77 percent (up from 50 percent last year) have county governing body meeting minutes available online, archived and searchable
- 36 percent provide citizen request and complaint tracking
- 20 percent of responding counties have created listservs and their archives

### Implementation of Web Tools and Applications

Inter-relating the types of services available online with the extent of interactive transactions possible presents a very complete overview of how far the Web interface with citizens has evolved. Examined based on specific services to citizens, we see in the sample of services in the chart below that there are wide differences in online availability and the nature of possible transactions offered.

Services	Not available online	View and download (print and fill out)	Submit online	Transact* online	Transact* via IVR
Building permits	35%	47%	23%	21%	16%
Public procurements (bids or RFPs)	14%	70%	22%	12%	0%
Parks and recreation services	21%	52%	26%	34%	3%
Animal services	31%	55%	21%	19%	0%
Child support or child care	38%	46%	21%	22%	6%
County records request	23%	48%	41%	38%	0%
Court services	37%	51%	25%	17%	9%
Library card or materials renewal	41%	31%	41%	32%	6%
Tax filing and payment	23%	36%	41%	59%	22%
Parking tickets or traffic citations	60%	16%	15%	26%	9%
Public facilities locator map	34%	42%	17%	17%	1%
GIS maps	10%	53%	34%	40%	0%

\*Transact means a secure end-to-end transaction that includes submission and payments as authorized.

### The One-Stop Citizen Portal

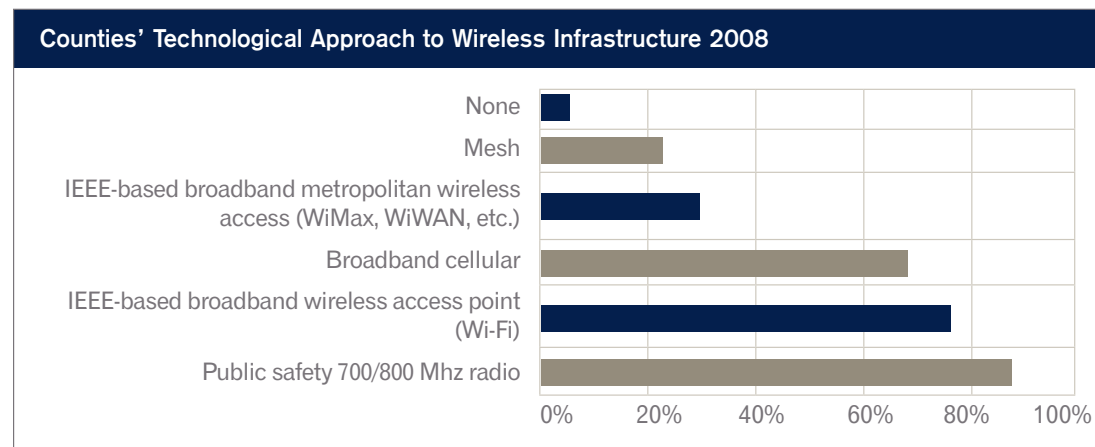
It has been long noted that citizens frequently do not know the organizational structure of their local government. When they wish to report a problem or request services, they do not always know where to go. The proven solution is for the county to provide a single citizen service area on its Web site where constituents can request services, report problems or complaints about these services and complete citizen satisfaction surveys. This type of offering is increasing. Apart from those counties that provide a “one-stop citizen portal,” an additional one-fifth of respondents indicated that they had plans underway to implement this type of citizen interface. Specifically, when asked if the county provides such a single service area, the answers were as follows:

Does the county provide a single citizen service area on its Web site?	Percent
a. No, not at this time.	31%
b. Implementation is scheduled by Dec. 31, 2008, or the service center exists but is not yet accessible through one click from the Web site.	19%
c. The online citizen service area (transmissions, not e-mail) on the county's Web site is accessible through one click from the Web site.	31%
d. The Web citizen service area has the attributes listed in “c” above and utilizes the same database as the telephone call center.	20%
Total	100%

### Broadband and Wireless Infrastructure

As information technologies continue to evolve and citizens become more familiar and comfortable with Web 2.0 technologies, issues of infrastructure — utilized and potentially available to the county — become increasingly relevant. Several questions in this year's survey intended to capture continuing broadband trends.

The survey sought to identify the underlying thinking about a county's technological approach to wireless. Respondents were asked to indicate their strategic directions regarding wireless. (More than one could be selected.)



Counties were also asked how broadband networking — wireless and wire line broadband community-wide networks — were being built.

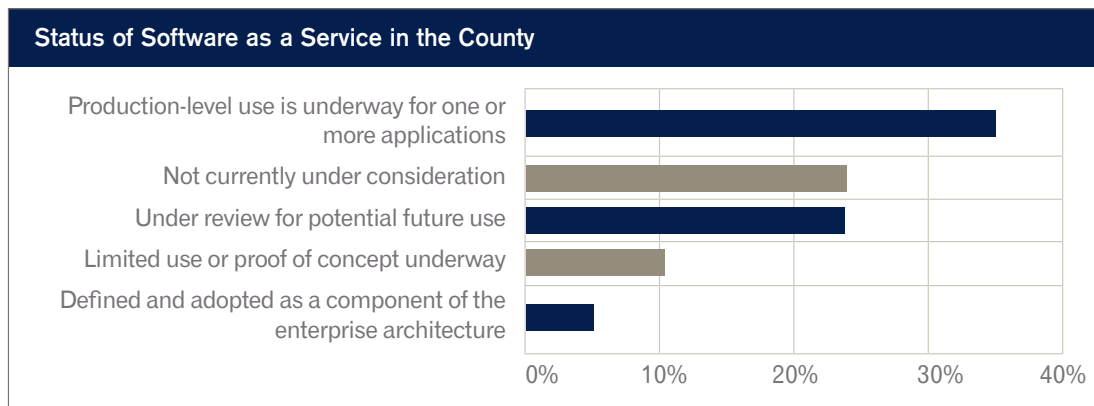
Counties' approach to broadband build-out:	None	County-owned utility	Private provider	Both
Wire line broadband — the county's approach is best described as:	15%	7%	45%	32%
Wireless broadband — the county's approach is best described as:	15%	11%	44%	29%

Along the same lines, the counties were asked to indicate how such network build-outs — wireless and wired — were funded.

Counties' approach to broadband funding:	None	Advertising (directly or through third party)	Public appropriation	Subscriber fees/Charge backs	Combination
Wire line broadband — the county's approach is best described as:	25%	1%	27%	27%	18%
Wireless broadband — the county's approach is best described as:	22%	1%	29%	22%	25%

### Software as a Service

The notion of software as a service — commonly referred to as SaaS — is being promoted by some vendors as one direction toward which the applications industry can evolve to provide increased benefits. We sought to identify how much traction this is gaining in small and large counties.



## Greening of Counties

As NACo notes on its Web site, “Green momentum is here, and counties have positioned themselves as leaders. With increasing momentum, green policies and programs have taken shape as counties hunt for the most effective targets, incentives and rewards to help affect behavioral change in their communities.” This year’s survey sought to determine the degree to which IT strategies and practices aligned with the county’s overall sustainability program or climate action plan. Less than one-quarter of respondents (22 percent) felt that their IT strategies were fully aligned to environmental plans or programs. One-third of respondents (33 percent) felt their IT strategies were somewhat aligned and nearly one-tenth (9 percent) felt they were not aligned.

Additionally, we asked what steps the county had taken through IT to ensure climate and environmental sustainability. The most significant actions to date have been data center and server virtualization and consolidation, e-waste recycling efforts and hardware refresh policies that reflect energy efficiency best practices.

Counties’ green/sustainability efforts:	Percent
Established metrics and installed instruments to measure energy efficiencies	30%
Data center consolidation and virtualization	65%
Server consolidation and virtualization	89%
PC, laptop and server refresh policies reflect energy efficiency best practices	65%
E-waste recycling efforts and earth friendly disposal	71%
Transparency about the resulting carbon footprint using initiatives such as the Carbon Disclosure Project at <a href="http://www.cdproject.net">www.cdproject.net</a>	4%

## Conclusion

Again this year, the Digital Counties Survey documented real and substantial technological progress and innovation by county governments of all sizes. This continued drive to harness new technologies to improve service to citizens and to ensure more efficient use of government resources is illustrated by the range of initiatives that counties have embarked upon.

Leading counties, identified by the survey, continue to provide inspiration and leadership through example to many other counties — certainly all those who participated in this year’s survey — that recognize the vital nature of the continuing IT revolution in local government. And this is occurring across a broad spectrum of service delivery needs despite the budgetary challenges that seem to be an enduring reality of this decade.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> *Democracy and Citizen Participation in the U.S.: The Role of Local Government*, Marilyn Gittell, Department of Political Science, The Graduate Center — The City University of New York

The Digital Counties Survey was underwritten by Hyland Software, developers of OnBase, Microsoft and CDW-G Corp., and reflects the common vision of the Center for Digital Government, a national research and advisory institute on information technology policies and best practices in state and local government, and the National Association of Counties (NACo), a full-service organization that provides legislative, research, technical and public affairs assistance to county governments. Created in 1935, NACo continues to ensure that the nation's 3,066 counties are heard and understood in the White House and Congress.



© 2008 e.Republic, Inc. All rights reserved. e.Republic also publishes *Government Technology* magazine and *Public CIO* journal. Quote only with attribution.

**Executive Direction:** Cathilea Robinett, executive vice president, Center for Digital Government

**Administration:** Mary Noel, senior vice president of research, Center for Digital Government

**Survey Design:** Paul W. Taylor, Ph.D., chief strategy officer, with Janet Grenslitt, director of survey and award programs, Center for Digital Government

**Report and Analysis:** Blake Harris, editor, *Digital Communities* magazine, with Janet Grenslitt, director of survey and award programs, Center for Digital Government

**Report Editors:** Jeana Graham, editor for custom publications, Center for Digital Government

For more information on the survey or the Center for Digital Government, contact **Janet Grenslitt at 916.932.1300 or [jgrenslitt@centerdigitalgov.com](mailto:jgrenslitt@centerdigitalgov.com).**