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Opportunity in Crisis: Consolidation, Collaboration & Cooperation in Local Government

By Todd Sander, director of the Digital Communities program,
with the assistance of the Digital Communities Infrastructure Task Force

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Introduction

The Declaration of Independence — America's first step in self-governance — eloquently stated that "Governments are instituted among men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed."

Since that time, the American experience has seen that consent extend from New England-style town meetings to special taxing districts, boards, councils, legislatures and, ultimately, the federal government. Each layer is specifically initiated, comprised, authorized and funded to provide particular services to the governed.

Over time, the nature of our social structures; our population patterns; our ability to travel and communicate over distance and our ability to create, share and act on information has changed dramatically. Our system of government, from the pilgrim landing to global economic competition, has created a public service delivery system that has grown so large that funding and maintaining it places a frustrating and heavy burden on the "governed."

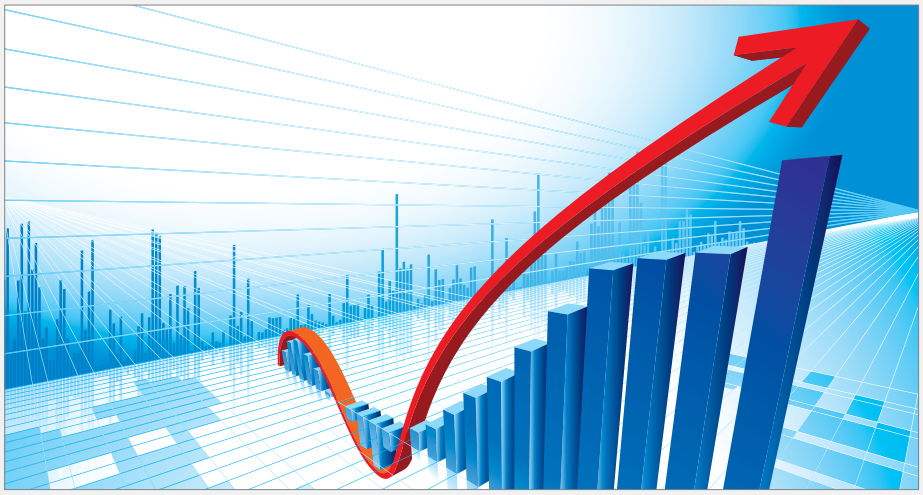
In response, citizens are looking at the government they own — with its multiple layers and divisions — and asking why there isn't more cooperation and collaboration. After all, in America, all government springs forth from a single source: the consent of the governed. Government at every level is created to serve and meet the needs of its creators. On its face, it is a simple question. However, the answer touches many of the most fundamental human desires: power, control and self-interest among them.

> Economic and fiscal realities are moving the debate from "How much government do we need?" to an even more practical and pragmatic "How much government can we afford?"

Economic and fiscal realities are raising the criticality of the question and moving the debate from "How much government do we need?" to an even more practical and pragmatic "How much government can we afford?" This seems to be especially true at the local government level in towns, cities and counties where government employees and the services they deliver are closer to the people.

A recent public opinion survey of residents in Northeast Ohio conducted jointly by Cleveland State University and Wright State University found that 82 percent of residents favor greater government collaborations and 67 percent favor government consolidations as a way to mitigate the high cost of local government services. Compared to previous surveys, the most recent query finds that the public's support for government collaboration and consolidation has grown dramatically during this decade. For example, 54 percent of respondents in the most recent survey said they even favored consolidation of public safety forces, compared with only 27 percent in 2005.[1]

The citizens of Northeast Ohio are certainly not alone. With property values slumping and states across the nation confronting large budget deficits, two major sources of funds for local government are under pressure — property taxes and state revenue sharing. As the economy slows, sales tax collection also decreases, putting pressure on the third leg of the local government revenue stool. At the very time revenue is decreasing, local governments are seeing a surge in demand for their services as the recession increases the demand for government assistance. After years of premature pronouncements, local governments really do find themselves at the point where they "need to do more with less."



One specific area of need is within the building industry. Local governments are desperately seeking ways to stimulate more efficient and rapid construction growth that will, in turn, stimulate their economies. The use of technology that supports online and mobile functionality, and provides back office automation and workflow, holds the key to working smarter and faster.

Local governments cannot stop providing services and are, in fact, under pressure to perform better. They are simply going to have to find ways to deliver needed services to more people at less cost. One way to accomplish this is through greater collaboration, and in some cases, consolidation of services. Fortunately, information and communication technology (ICT) can provide an answer and a solution, and some trailblazing local governments are already leading the way.

The Opportunity

"As we begin the new calendar year, our budgets are still a mess, all new initiatives are on hold, and we continue to find ourselves in 'maintenance' mode," wrote Carl Drescher, an IT administrator with the city of Tucson, Ariz., in his blog "In the Trenches" on the *Digital Communities* Web site. "There are a number of technologies that would benefit our organization and the provision of service delivery to our community, however the capital needed to invest in these technologies does not exist."

Drescher went on to cite the differences between private and public sector finances.

"Generally speaking, IT spending in local government is not on par with the private sector," he said. "In my case, the city IT budget is approximately 2.5 percent of the total general fund budget. Tax dollars are used by the city, county, K-12, community college and surrounding towns to build, maintain and support separate data centers, networks, IT departments and licensing of applications. Wouldn't IT dollars be better spent on building one network infrastruc-

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ture for all of these entities? Couldn't one ERP application be licensed and used for all of these agencies?"

For Drescher, the answers may not be easy, but they are clear cut. "By pooling resources and eliminating redundancy of effort, economies of scale can be realized and each governmental agency would be better positioned to use technology as a means of reducing costs and providing a higher level of service to internal and external customers," he wrote. "Yes, there are tremendous political hurdles to clear, but given the fact that budget and revenue shortfalls will be the norm for the foreseeable future, the political will might be building for moving towards such a solution. I believe that this service model is the future of public sector IT and that the current economic conditions could be the catalyst to make this happen sooner."[2]

The city of Tucson certainly isn't unique when it comes to facing financial uncertainty. Communities across the country are struggling. In an open letter Jan. 31, 2009, to city employees and his community, New Bedford, Mass., Mayor Scott W. Lang pointed out that, effective Jan. 28, 2009, the state had reduced the city's local aid by $2.7 million, requiring city government to cut nearly $140,000 per week until the end of their fiscal year on June 30.[3]

In an attempt to avoid layoffs, Lang proposed a 15-point plan that included some personnel concessions, including a 10 percent salary reduction, as well as some departmental consolidation and regionalization of service delivery. However, his proposal was not acceptable to employees and New Bedford now seems to be moving ahead with layoffs and some dramatic reorganization of its city government.[4]

The situation in New Bedford is but one example of what many communities are facing. Governments and educational institutions have had to implement involuntary furloughs, layoffs and significant program cuts. All of this is evidence that change is coming to local government service delivery — voluntarily or involuntarily.

This is a pivotal time for government IT leaders. Some will try to resist and cling to the structure and framework of the past, while others will support change and take the opportunity to help define its direction and nature. Either way, changes and choices must be made.

A Time For Sharing

Many of those who choose to see the situation as an opportunity are moving toward shared services as an economical and politically responsive service delivery approach.

Shared services represent a consolidation of service or support functions that had previously been found in more than one part of an organization or group. Under the new model, funding and resources are efficiently consolidated with a single service provider that performs the function for all business units or partners. This approach reduces unnecessary organizational and technical duplication and cost.

Once the decision has been made to move away from a "go it alone" model of total technical self-sufficiency, a variety of collaboration options are available. Based on Center for Digital Government research and Digital City and Digital County annual survey responses, most jurisdictions are exploring at least one of the following options.

Technical Consolidation

Technical consolidation is one form of shared services, and when appropriately planned and managed, it can be quite successful. Common examples are the consolidation of multiple data centers into a single facility, the implementation of enterprise resource planning (ERP) systems or standardization of networking and e-mail infrastructure. Many jurisdictions have been able to achieve significant efficiencies by eliminating expensive and unnecessary infrastructure and by focusing and streamlining support of what is retained.

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>
> — Mickey Crittenden, Director of Information Technology, Rock County, Wis.

Taken just a small step further, technology consolidation can also be achieved when multiple jurisdictions make the decision to standardize on a single system or platform. This creates opportunities for greater technical interoperability, reduced support complexity and lower cost achieved through aggregated purchasing and streamlined operations and maintenance.

Westchester County, N.Y., has created a comprehensive shared services program that is based on the recognition that a county taxpayer is also a local government, school and special district taxpayer. Therefore, their program is designed to help all levels of local government reduce the overall tax burden through collaboration and sharing. The county service catalog asks potential customer jurisdictions, "Why should you pay for something if we already have the expertise or resources that can save you money and time?"

The county offers cooperative purchasing support, information technology network and office systems, geographic mapping, emergency services, public works augmentation, a mobile shredding service and public safety and emergency management training and assistance.[5]

Mickey Crittenden, the director of information technology in Rock County, Wis., is also one who sees opportunity in the current uncertainty to proactively address change.

"In the near future, economic forces will trump the parochial barriers to shared services that exist today," Crittenden said. "In Wisconsin, we have compelling reasons to share services to a greater degree than we share them today. For example, Wisconsin state statutes specify the exact duties of the county register of deeds, yet all 72 counties are currently on the hook to provide the land records systems for managing property sales records and tract indexing. Needless to say, we are 72 ships passing in the night developing or purchasing our own solutions to accomplish the exact same business process. The result is a plethora of different systems that in aggregate cost way more than a commonly used solution. In short, every county in the state should be using the same system for managing all register of deeds offices. Shared services represent low-lying fruit for saving taxpayers' money, and parochial and artificial barriers to such shared services must be removed — the sooner, the better."[6]

In the state of Oregon, the Department of Consumer and Business Services' Building, Codes Division is utilizing enterprise technology to expand its successful Quick Permits system used by 33 city and county building departments and their local contractors. When fully implemented, the program will allow contractors to conduct building department activities, such as receiving plan approval, scheduling inspections online, and applying and paying for permits any hour of the day or night.

The advantages of Oregon's statewide e-permitting system are many: it speeds the construction process, augments the state's competitiveness, reduces the environmental impact related to countless trips to and from city and county building departments, enhances customer service on several levels, and provides the construction industry a more predictable regulatory environment.

In North Carolina, the North Carolina Association of County Commissioners (NCACC) acts as the sponsoring entity for a shared information technology system

called the NCACC Collaborative Property Tax System (NCPTS). NCPTS, originally created by Wake County and a commercial vendor under contract, is a fully integrated tax software system that automates, streamlines and integrates tax administration functions such as real estate, personal property, vehicle tax, billing, collections, land records and appraisal. The software system has been developed to adhere to North Carolina property tax law and is now available to counties without a licensing fee through the NCACC.[7]

The NCPTS is an example of what multiple jurisdictions can achieve when they are willing to work together to consolidate their ICT and focus on a common goal. This collaboration has multiple benefits, including the potential for creating a common, perhaps even "template" approach to delivering citizen services in many areas. Conversely, failure to work together can easily result in a costly duplication of effort as local governments create administrative silos that require duplicative and unnecessary investments in systems and services.

Functional Collaboration

Functional collaboration is another common approach that encourages people to work together. For example, many communities participate in geographic information systems (GIS) cooperatives comprised of members representing a variety of organizations, including cities, counties, state agencies, universities and sometimes even utilities. By agreeing to standardize their technology infrastructure, purchase cooperatively and share the expense of creating the digital images necessary for the creation of base maps, all participants are able to have access to systems and data that are more robust, capable and complete than they would be able to acquire and support if they were to purchase everything individually and separately. GIS practitioners have been among the most successful pioneers of multi-jurisdictional functional collaboration by developing workable shared governance structures and by staying focused on the end product and common benefits achieved by collaboration.

The New York State GIS Coordinating Body is an excellent example of broad collaboration. It brings together over 800 member jurisdictions and organizations representing academia, counties, cities and towns, non-profits, federal and state agencies all focused on removing "barriers to implementing geographic information technology to improve the delivery of public services, protect the public and the environment, and enhance the business climate for the benefit of the state, its municipalities, businesses and citizens." Put another way, it provides better results with less unnecessary redundancy and with lower cost than jurisdictions acting independently.[8]

State and local governments in Michigan have a well-established history of success as pioneers and are national

leaders in the development and deployment of collaborative information technology and infrastructure.

Ken Theis, state of Michigan CIO, is positioning the state as a leader in developing what he calls "cross-boundary opportunities." In essence, the state is looking at how best to leverage some of its services and infrastructure to better support counties, townships and municipalities. By positioning the state to work with local government in support of shared responsibilities and programs, public officials at all levels of government are able to make sure Michigan taxpayers receive the maximum benefit from their tax-dollar investments.

Recently, two Michigan state agencies wanted to build an e-health application. Oakland County, Mich., already had a state-of-the-art e-health application, so they approached the state of Michigan and offered the e-health application to them for use statewide. Oakland County saw the benefits in a shared system and thought that the state should not re-invent the system on their own. Theis and his team agreed, bringing the Oakland County system in-house to create a single application shared by the state of Michigan, Oakland County, and six additional county health departments. Currently, the e-health partners are in the process of working out the final contractual details and are looking forward to having the system used elsewhere in the state. Theis has said an economic slowdown, with its tremendous financial pressures for state agencies and local governments, often brings separate agencies and areas to the table that are more willing to work together than they may have been in the past.[9]

Many communities, particularly those that have had difficulty attracting major telecommunication commercial carrier investments, have also been able to collaborate in the creation of a broadband infrastructure.

A consortium of municipal resources for the Fox Valley in Northeast Wisconsin is a good example of what can be accomplished when people are willing to work in cooperation. The Interactive Network for the Fox Cities (INFOCIS) recently passed its 10th anniversary and is serving seven participating jurisdictions, including the founding partners of the city of Appleton, Appleton Area School District, town of Grand Chute, Outagamie County and Fox Valley Technical College.

INFOCIS was originally created under a Wisconsin state statute that encourages cooperative activity between multiple jurisdictions.[10] It provides a mechanism that allows for joint grant writing, staff development and sharing of technology resources in the development and implementation of a $2.5 million, 40-mile fiberoptic network connecting 49 sites. The network supports various public service applications, including remote meter reading, pubic safety communications and wireless Internet access for citizens.

Regional Cooperation

Regional cooperation is another example of multiple jurisdictions collaborating to improve service and lower cost. The North Central Texas Council of Governments (NCTCOG) has offered a shared technology service program to any entity eligible to sign an inter-local agreement with them for some time. When putting services together, NCTCOG follows a process that meets all of the competitive procurement regulations, negating the requirement for entities to individually go through the Request for Proposals process.

By creating a shared service opportunity focused on the cooperative purchasing of goods and services and sharing internal resources among multiple organizations, participants are able to reduce the costs and risks associated with system acquisition and implementation.[11]

In Colorado, the Government Shared Services Council (GSSC) is a subcommittee of the Colorado Government Association of Information Technology (CGAIT). Its mission is to utilize collaborative technology and resources across government entities to provide effective and efficient citizen-centered services.

Goals for the GSSC are:

- to establish a group to discuss opportunities for shared IT services;
- to provide governance for implementing shared IT services;
- to create a shared IT services catalog; and
- to provide opportunities to reduce costs for citizen-centered services.

By bringing multiple local government jurisdictions to the table together, CGAIT and the GSSC have been able to put the foundational documents in place to start sharing things such as GIS, ERP, e-mail, assessor systems and the like.[12]

The Puget Sound region of the state of Washington has seen several local communities work together to form the eCityGov Alliance, an inter-local agency

SHARED SERVICES SUCCESSES

The North Central Texas Council of Governments (NCTCOG) offers a variety of shared service opportunities including:

- **Aerial Photography and Digital Elevation Contours** — facilitates the cooperative purchase of high-quality, color, digital aerial photography and digital elevation contours for North Central Texas as a cost-sharing opportunity for local governments.
- **CityNet** — offers tier-one enterprise resource planning either onsite or hosted at NCTCOG's data center. Applications include financial management and reporting, workflow and process automation and document imaging.
- **iCommunities Internet Service** — combines Internet and map technology with local government planning, economic development and geographic information systems (GIS) resources, transforming local government Web sites into an information source that is both interactive and customizable to users' needs.
- **Subscription-Based Software Plus Services** — offers financial, human resources, payroll, utility billing, work order, permitting, customer relationship management (CRM) and other software through traditional purchase and implementation methods or a subscription model.

with a mission of providing Web-based services to its constituents. The Alliance began in 2001 with nine founding partner jurisdictions. Now, the Alliance is serving 39 agencies, including 34 cities, one county, a fire district, two economic development councils and an airport.

Because it is often the case that constituents are frustrated when they don't know what government agency to turn to for a particular service, the eCityGov Alliance began to think, grow and experiment with business solutions that would replace city-centric Web services with seamless, cross-boundary Web services. The Alliance and member cities' shared goal is to provide constituents with easy-to-find, consistent services, regardless of which city is responsible for providing the service.

State governments are also looking to benefit from greater collaboration. Citing a unique opportunity for reform in the face of difficult economic circumstances, Wisconsin Democratic Gov. Jim Doyle and Minnesota Republican Gov. Tim Pawlenty recently announced an effort to identify collaboration and shared services opportunities between their states.

"The people of our states are used to seeing neighbors cooperate to get through challenging times," Doyle said. "This is a common sense way to cut government spending while protecting essential services during a tough economic time for our country."[13]

In addition to cooperative purchasing and sharing facilities and vehicles, Wisconsin and Minnesota are exploring several areas where information and communication technology systems such as shared call centers, revenue collection operations, an automated professional licensing system and administrative support functions can merge to provide regional support.

SERVICE-SPECIFIC PORTALS

MyBuildingPermit.com

MyParksandRecreation.com

NWMaps.net

NWProperty.net

WAGovBiz.net

Joint Venture

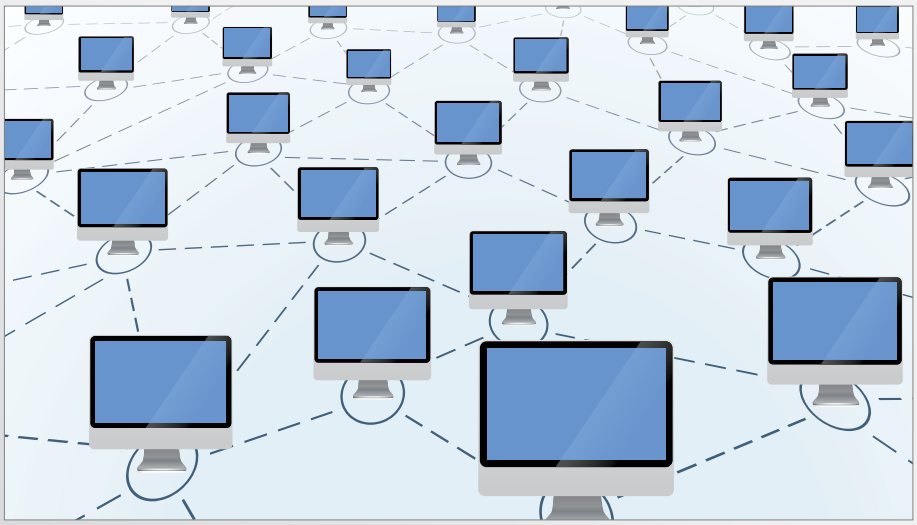
Public- and private-sector organizations are also beginning to look more seriously for opportunities to work not only as purchasers and vendors, but as business partners. The joint venture is gaining popularity and acceptance as a way to respond to rising costs, the economic downturn, aging technology infrastructures and growing gaps between service expectation and affordable delivery.

One of the best examples of a successful joint venture comes from the United Kingdom, where three public-sector entities have taken an important step toward establishing a new governance model based on innovative collaboration. Acting alone, none of the three entities — Somerset County Council, Taunton Deane Borough Council, and Avon and Somerset Police — could afford or produce the results they desired within their existing capacities. Realizing this, they joined forces with a major private-sector partner to leverage their respective resources and strengths toward a common purpose. The result is Southwest One, a 10-year joint venture to transform both frontline services and back-office operations of the three entities. Transformation goals include improved service delivery, greater efficiencies, lower costs and access to advanced technologies.

The core principle of the joint venture is the belief that joining forces provides better service for the public at a lower cost to government.

"Where it's coming together is the way we can all benefit from the economies of scale," said Roger Kershaw, corporate director of resources for Somerset County Council. "Together we can afford a better quality and higher-impact service than we could all afford individually."

Cost savings for the three government agencies are expected to be $553 million over 10 years.[14]



State and local leaders in Virginia have also started exploring options for bringing the public and private sector together in collaboration, including a proposal currently circulating for a new non-profit organization referred to as the Government Open Collaborative Consortium (GOCC).

"The purpose of GOCC would be to facilitate (project manage, administer, coordinate, communicate, disseminate, enable, etc.) the technology sharing in state and local government," said Andy Stein, director of information technology in the city of Newport News, Va. "The concept is that we are not that different from one organization to the next and a technology that works for one could be cost shared with many others. However, unless the sharing process is structured and well supported, it rarely occurs by consensus."[15]

Within GOCC, the focus would be on sharing joint technology projects where multiple independent organizations have common goals and share the cost of development, implementation, support or ongoing operations of specific technology solutions. GOCC would manage the repository of shared intellectual property (IP) assets and ensure that the licensing methods employed fit desired collaboration outcomes and that licensing restrictions are not violated. The result would be lower cost to government, achieved through cooperative purchasing and an increased sales opportunity from the resulting market aggregation for the private sector.

Collaboration With Or Without You

The National Academy of Public Administration (NAPA) has created what it calls the Collaboration Project, based on the realization that collaboration is happening whether or not government gets involved. As far as government is concerned, this is the key paradox of mass collaboration: any technology that allows government to "go around" its normal bureaucratic constraints also has the potential to let citizens "go around" government itself.[16]

In some cases, community groups have simply given up on waiting for government to change and have taken matters into their own hands. A research report by a University of Colorado assistant professor that was published in *New Scientist Magazine* describes how, during the 2007 wildfires in San Diego, Calif., area residents armed with an array of online social media tools such as blogs, annotatable maps, photo-sharing Web sites and instant messenging services, were able to gather and disseminate information on the progress of the fire, the location of evacuation areas and shelters, and school and business closures — information unavailable through traditional channels.[17]

Because anyone with an Internet connection can access and contribute to these sites, they were an incredible tool for up-to-the-minute information from far-flung rural areas that the media and emergency services were not able to reach. In addition, many residents said the media reports were biased towards metropolitan areas and focused on the sensational, while official information sources tended to be out of date.[18]

In another example, the non-profit group My Society in the United Kingdom created Fix My Street, one of the earliest examples of direct citizen service request systems. My Society has two stated missions: to be a charitable project that builds Web sites to give people simple, tangible benefits in the civic and community aspects of their lives; and to teach the public and voluntary sectors, through demonstration, how to use the Internet most efficiently to improve lives.

The goal of the Fix My Street Web site is to assist in the resolution of issues such as landscaping, trash collection, pot holes and street lighting in towns and communities across the United Kingdom. These problems are reported and aggregated on the site, and then sent to the nearest town council for action.[19]

Through the Internet, someone who sees something broken in their local area visits the site, sticks a virtual pin into the map and enters a short description of what's wrong. After the citizen submits the issue, the site works out what sort of problem it is and e-mails the relevant part of the appropriate local council with a copy of the report. The council can then enter the data easily into their own system, and with one click report the status as changed both on the map, and in an e-mail to the problem reporter. The system also allows constituents to understand if anyone else has already reported a problem, and to see how the council is acting on it.

As more people access the site, an interesting and unexpected use has arisen — police officers themselves have started filing reports on the site, where previously they might just have made a phone call or sent a letter to the council in question. The interesting part is that the reports are visible and searchable by the general public. If the council does their job promptly, favorable comments can be left on the public site. And if they don't, there's no question about whether the information was ever passed on to them.

Benefits of Direct Citizen Request Systems

- Zero integration required into council front or back-end systems
- Easy-to-use interface increases reporting
- Connects citizens with mutual local concerns with one another
- Option to run on an independent site, or brand and run on council site
- Compatible with all council street maintenance systems
- Rapid installation (less than 1 week)[20]

Many similar service request systems have been implemented in communities in the U.S. in recent years; however, most of them are managed and maintained by local government and focus on a single jurisdiction. One can only wonder how long it will be before more citizen-driven public service systems appear in this country if government continues to delay.

CHANGING CONTROL

Local government is about local control. Something that is a priority in one community and worthy of receiving a fair portion of limited resources may not be a priority to a neighboring community. Conflicting priorities can make collaboration difficult, but if government doesn't accept the challenge it runs the risk of being overtaken by citizen-driven self-help systems that make government less relevant. For many, it is a case of "my system meets my needs and so it is something for which I will pay." The next town, the next county, or the next state will likely have a slightly different view of priorities and will have established a differing support system. The difficult question becomes, "Who is willing to change in order to share?" It is an important question, but only to those inside government.

For that singular group of taxpayers who are residents of the city, the county and the state, there is a growing realization that they are often being asked to fund duplicative or unnecessarily redundant systems. Perhaps at one time they may have been necessary for individual governments to maintain control, but now many of them can and should be combined — if not done away with completely.

As governments take up the challenge of becoming more flexible and providing more affordable service, it is quite possible that at least in some areas, the days of big, single-purpose standalone systems may be over.

As governments take up the challenge of becoming more flexible and providing more affordable service, it is quite possible that at least in some areas, the days of big, single-purpose standalone systems may be over. Things such as disk space, bandwidth and computing power are shifting from asset investments to commodity purchases.

"People both inside and outside government — especially Generation X and Generation Y — are incredibly frustrated by being able to use lightning-fast applications like Twitter, Flickr, YouTube and Facebook that don't even live on their hard drives, while the government and other large organizations still operate clunky PCs, space-limited e-mail accounts, and sluggish e-mail servers," said Dan Munz, a project manager for the NAPA Collaboration Project.[21]

As the general public becomes more familiar with Web 2.0 technologies and their effective deployment through popular social networking sites, their expectations for electronic interaction continue to rise. This places a greater burden on government to create service delivery systems and interfaces that meet those expectations. Government will need to keep pace if it is to satisfy constituents and attract a new generation to public service. The historical approach to technology acquisition and implementation is simply too complicated and too expensive to continue. The answer for local government is further consolidation, collaboration and cooperation.

Shared architecture and infrastructure collaboration efforts like those in place through the eCityGov Alliance, the North Central Texas Council of Governments, and others build upon a Web 2.0 framework and create what is, in effect, a

pre-configured point and click collaboration among applications. It furthers the goal and necessity of getting the most out of information technology infrastructure investments already in place, rather than embarking on new and costly large-scale projects in an era of diminishing budgets.

This sort of Web 2.0 flexibility and economy provides opportunity for organizational and service transformation that not only supports service delivery, but that also invites greater local constituent participation. The most successful governments will be those that look outside themselves to the public they serve for ideas and suggestions on how to make change truly meaningful and will require a genuine willingness to alter the processes of government to respond to community expectations. The historical "illusion of inclusion" created when government asks for advice on issues that have essentially already been decided will no longer suffice or do anything to make government more successful. That is the essence of accountability and transparency and it will go a long way toward reestablishing public trust in government and securing the "consent of the governed."

Conclusion

Almost immediately upon taking office, President Obama issued a memorandum to his administration declaring "Government should be collaborative."

"Executive departments and agencies should use innovative tools, methods and systems to cooperate among themselves, across all levels of government, and with non-profit organizations, businesses and individuals in the private sector," Obama stated. "Executive departments and agencies should solicit public feedback to assess and improve their level of collaboration and to identify new opportunities for cooperation."[22]

Seeing the federal government actively seek ways to collaborate certainly represents a change for those who have spent time in state or local government. We can remain optimistic and open to the possibility.

However, local government need not, and should not wait on the federal government to lead the way. A shift toward collaboration and a shared services model can create transformational change in local organizations now, but it requires strong leadership, informed decision-making, focus on execution and clear communication. The challenge does not lie with technology, but rather with those who are worried about the implications of a shrinking workforce, the need to develop new skill sets with new responsibilities and the potential implications for traditional structures like employee union agreements.

The success or failure of collaboration will be determined by whether or not public employees are willing to take up the challenge of change and break down the historical barriers that have supported organizational individuality in favor of a greater common good.

The success or failure of collaboration will be determined by whether or not public employees are willing to take up the challenge of change and break down the historical barriers that have supported organizational individuality in favor of a greater common good. Ego and turf have simply become too expensive to protect and maintain.

Carl Drescher accurately summed up the public's desire for better government and the opportunity for local leaders to fulfill that desire when he wrote, "Desperate times call for drastic measures — well maybe. I prefer to believe that every crisis provides an opportunity. In this case, it is an opportunity to do the right thing."[23]

Consolidation, Collaboration and Cooperation Preplanning Checklist

- ☐ Is the existing problem or reason for change an opportunity or situation that requires a comprehensive response?
- ☐ Have you clearly identified the overall goals or objectives you seek to achieve?
- ☐ Are those goals and objectives well understood, well communicated to participants and agreed upon?
- ☐ Does the group have an appropriate and representative cross-section of members, each of whom brings something real, valuable and necessary to the effort?
- ☐ Have individual member's tasks, roles and responsibilities been clearly defined and agreed upon, paying special attention to dependencies, gaps, overlaps and risks?
- ☐ Are members able and willing to participate in the decision-making process and hold each other accountable?
- ☐ Do participants have a history of working together successfully?
- ☐ Have capable, experienced and respected leaders been identified who are able and willing to resolve conflicts and keep the effort focused on the desired vision, mission, values, principles and outcomes?
- ☐ Do members see collaboration and cooperation as ultimately supportive of their self-interest?
- ☐ Have you identified and secured the necessary resources including revenue, time, personnel and political support required to make and sustain change?
- ☐ Are the necessary policies, laws and regulations in place to support change, or has a plan been created and agreed to for making necessary changes to the authorizing framework?
- ☐ Will the change effort be able to sustain itself through adaptation in response to major changes of personnel, financial structure or political priority or support?

Endnotes

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100 Blue Ravine Road
Folsom, CA 95630
916.932.1300 phone
916.932.1470 fax

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Phil Bertolini, Deputy County Executive & CIO, Oakland County, Mich.

Mickey Crittenden, IT Director, Rock County, Wis.

Carl Drescher, Administrator, Tucson, Ariz.

Scott Fernqvist, Special Assistant to the CIO for Global Strategy & Economic Development, Westchester County, N.Y.

Michele Hovet, CIO, City of Arvada, Colo.

Jim Lindauer, Chief Architect, Jefferson County, Colo.

Andy Stein, IT Director, Newport News, Va.