eGEEC 2005
e-government eastern european conference

Building Local E-Government through Public-Private Partnerships
Sinaia, Romania, Sept 12-13, 2005
Conference Conclusions

The USAID-funded Romanian Information Technology Initiative Project (RITI dot-Gov), in partnership with the Romanian Ministry of Communications and Information Technology, convened an e-government forum on building local projects through public private partnerships on September 12-13, 2005. The conference attracted public and private sector delegates from Romania and throughout Eastern Europe for an examination of e-government concepts, best practices and implementation techniques. The presentations covered, among other issues, the financing of e-government initiatives, citizen participation in the development of e-government projects, and sophisticated initiatives such as e-taxation and the use of geo-spatial information.

Fundamentals

1. It is important to have a national strategy for e-government, covering all three phases: publish, interact, transact. In the rush to develop more sophisticated transactional services, administrators should not fail to complete publish initiatives. As part of the e-government strategy and its implementation, public officials must identify legal and policy barriers to e-government. The strategy should specify target groups and needs and identify priorities.

2. The e-government strategy should be part of an overall national ICT strategy that addresses affordability and accessibility.

3. E-gov initiatives should be monitored and measured, in order to replicate successes and achieve citizen trust, and avoid wasting resources on projects that are not serving genuine needs.

4. Partnership and collaboration among public institutions, the business sector, and non-governmental organizations will help ensure e-government success. It is especially important that citizens be consulted in the development of e-government services and educated in their use.

5. Public administrators in Eastern Europe interested in e-government do not need to re-invent the wheel. The region has sufficient talent and experience to make e-government a broad reality. It is necessary now to connect the dots – to take the lessons learned from successful projects in the region and weave them together into a comprehensive approach to e-government.

6. E-government is not separate from the other fundamentals of government; rather, e-government projects must be related to broader goals of transforming public administration by making it more transparent, less cumbersome, and more responsive to the needs of citizens and business.

7. The e-gov vision has to be connected to local culture and local administration.

Requirements

1. For e-government projects to be successful, it is necessary to obtain the support of incumbent public servants, including by providing them with training and incentives to use the technology. International donors cannot on their own create successful e-government projects.

2. E-government depends on the general policy framework and infrastructure for digital communications. That policy framework must be designed to support innovation, expand access, and generate trust in online systems.

3. Leadership at the very top of government (at any level) is necessary to the success of e-government. The president or provincial governor or mayor must make it clear that the bureaucracy must support e-government and use the process of adopting e-government tools to manage differently.

4. Use of e-government resources will become widespread if there is a national commitment to fostering the information society, starting with education.

Gains & Benefits

1. E- government can improve efficiency, increase transparency and lighten the regulatory burden on new businesses.

2. Many of the benefits of e-government for the citizen are practical -- time and money savings, 24/7 availability -- but there are also important democratizing benefits. These include improved transparency and accountability as well as the expanded possibility of citizens making their voices heard in policymaking, such as by having the opportunity to comment on proposed laws and regulations.

3. E-government can make it easier to track administrative services, reducing the opportunities for corruption.

Key factors

1. Key factors in e-government success are:
   - expanding access to the ICT infrastructure;
   - responsiveness to citizen/business needs;
   - sustainability;
   - interoperability;
   - trust based on security and data protection
   - cross-jurisdiction and cross-sector cooperation;

- training.

2. Government officials seeking to create online services are integrators - that is why they should look to form partnerships. Public administrators must be capable of selecting vendors and managing e-government contracts.

3. Citizen participation is critical. Citizens are skeptical of government and they want to see results when tax money is being spent. Therefore, e-government projects should have a measurement component aimed not only at international donors but at ordinary citizens, so they can see the value in e-government services. That value will drive demand for Internet access.

4. Civil society advocates have an important role to play in ensuring that the systems that are being procured meet the needs of the citizens.

5. E-government should aim for the transformation of government, rather than merely computerizing inefficient offline procedures. ICTs offer the opportunity to shift from traditional methods of public administration to more streamlined approaches.

6. The most important shift is that the citizen is the focus of public administration.

Planning and Implementation Issues

1. A common challenge faced by e-government projects has been the resistance to change in the bureaucracies themselves. Administrators need to address this resistance directly, with incentives and training.

2. Governmental entities planning e-government initiatives need a mechanism to find out what has already been done in other jurisdictions, in order to not duplicate efforts. There should be a common database of e-government resources and initiatives for the region.

3. When a local governmental body is seeking to launch an initiative and there are not enough users locally to sustain the project, the local entity should consider a regional partnership.

4. Administrators should be honest about their mistakes, so that others can build on the lessons learned from failed projects as well as successful ones.

5. E-government projects in societies with low Internet penetration face a 'chicken and egg' problem: which should government policy promote first -- widespread Internet access or useful online content and services aimed at the domestic population? The answer is that the availability of online services can drive demand for Internet access. Public administrators should not wait until the access issue is solved. But it is incumbent on administrators to develop projects that are genuinely responsive to citizen and business needs, so that the availability of those services will drive demand for ICT access.

6. It is very important to define and measure success. Those procuring e-government services should insist that vendors build metrics into their

applications. Developing metrics includes defining the target audience and the desired outcomes.

7. The people who are implementing e-government systems have to believe in them. Therefore, public administrators have to be trained, starting in some cases with the very basics of computer technology and then moving up to applications.

8. Because public trust is so important, project design should include security and data protection. In addition, systems should be designed with simplicity and robustness.

9. When a project is based on an application developed in a Western country or by a Western vendor, make sure it is adapted to the local reality and needs.

10. E-government projects have to take into account the legislative and regulatory framework. Policymakers should examine that framework to identify areas where reform is needed to permit e-government initiatives.

11. When dealing with matters as important as tax information, system designers you have to take into account data protection.

The Access Question

1. One of the reasons for Estonia's success in e-government is that in 1995 it launched a nationwide effort to make the Internet widely available, including through public access points, and to train its citizens in ICT skills, beginning with the public schools and libraries. Computerization of schools boosts computer literacy. Hence, ministries of education are critical in developing the foundation for e-government and national integration into the global information economy.
2. In a number of countries, a major issue to expand access remains the dismantling of telecomm monopolies and the expansion of competition in ICT services.

Financing

1. Policymakers and public administrators should look for creative financing mechanisms.   For example, banks might be interested in collaborating on e-government projects and financing trainings because they will also promoting the use of online banking services. Banks have an interest in use of e-services because they are less expensive. Support for Internet banking could provide a foundation for e-taxation services.

2. There are many opportunities for financing. For instance, the conference heard about a project financed mainly by the local Flemish government in Belgium. In order to attract funding, government entities must define a project, chose a partner, and be prepared to offer matching local support.

The Future

1. The region has very sophisticated projects at both the national and the local levels. The next step is to knit these projects together into a coherent vision of e-

government so that national and local authorities can begin to develop a consistency among the projects and a linkage between them.

2. Interoperability should be a focus of the next phase of e-government planning, including at the European level.

3. E-government should not be seen only as the Web. The cellphone may be one of the most important portals for e-government services. Wireless communications open the possibility for a whole new gamut of applications. E-government projects should take into account people who will use public access points at cyber cafes and libraries or post offices.

4. Governments can expand access in concrete ways, including through public access points at schools and libraries and with kiosks, which have been demonstrated throughout the region.

5. One of our main missions today is to make citizens and small business owners realize the value of using the Internet and other ICT tools.