Chapter VII

A Community Facilitation Model for E-Government: A Case Study in Monitoring Water Quality

Kyle B. Murray, University of Western Ontario, Canada
Cory A. Habulin, Government of Alberta, Canada

Abstract

This chapter introduces a community facilitation model for e-government. The central tenet of this approach is the empowerment of a segment of the population to act, by providing the tools and information necessary to tackle issues that have been difficult to address with traditional approaches to government. Under this model, government provides an initial spark and then plays a supporting role in the growth of the community. By doing so, the costs of the program are minimized while the impact of the program is maximized. We examine the viability of the model by looking at a case study in water quality monitoring. The case illustrates the power of a government facilitated community of action to address an important problem, and it suggests that such a model can be applied globally and may be relevant to government initiatives beyond water monitoring.
Introduction

Electronic government initiatives have become a key component of ambitious programs aimed at transforming the way that government operates, with a specific focus on becoming more citizen-centered, effective, and efficient (Grant & Chau, 2005). As such, electronically mediated government programs are an increasingly important part of the interaction between governments and their citizens. This is true in the largest and most well-developed countries in North America and Western Europe as well as smaller nations such as Malta and Mauritius (Grant, 2005; UN World Public Sector Report, 2003). Whether the intended interactions are between any combination of individual citizens, not-for-profit organizations, businesses, or governments, the potential efficiency and cost-effectiveness of the electronic delivery of government services appears promising (Accenture, 2004). In addition, proponents of the expansion of e-government contend that it has a unique ability to empower citizens “by allowing them to contribute directly to the process of public government, as well as being a catalyst for economic and social development” (Grant, 2005, p. i).

In much the same way that corporations have increasingly adopted a market orientation rather than a product orientation — that is, a focus on their customers’ needs and wants, and their relationships with their customers — governments are being encouraged to adopt a more citizen-centered view (OECD, 2003). Although not everyone agrees with this approach to government (Hutton, 2005), it is clear that there is a nearly universal desire for more efficient and effective government. It is also apparent that developing countries and developed countries will have to work together to deal with some of the most serious problems that governments face today — for example, terrorism, the drug trade, economic policy, healthcare and disease control, and environmental issues. For each of these concerns, managing critical information and gaining citizen support are prerequisites for effective government action. On both counts, the Internet, and electronically mediated communication more generally, offer a significant advantage over traditional approaches in the dissemination of information and the organization of disperse populations. However, to-date few useful models have been proposed that would allow governments to capitalize on these advantages, and even fewer of these models have real world examples of their application and their potential for success on a global scale (e.g., Grant & Chau, 2005).

In this chapter, we introduce a community facilitation model for e-government. The following sections describe the model and its theoretical underpinnings. In our model, government provides an initial spark and then plays a supporting role in the growth of the community. By doing so, the costs of the program are minimized while the impact of the program is maximized. In the following sections, we examine the viability of the model by looking at a case study in water quality monitoring. The case illustrates the power of a government-facilitated community of action to address an important problem, and it suggests that such a model can be applied globally and may be relevant to government initiatives beyond water monitoring.
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