Chapter XI

GovBenefits.gov: A Case Study in Government-to-Citizen Interaction

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Executive Summary

This case study examines how 10 federal agencies came together in the fall of 2001 to implement an e-government initiative as part of President George W. Bush’s Presidential Management Agenda. The initiative, known as GovBenefits.gov™, is a Web site that connects citizens to 1,000 (390 federal and 610 state government) benefit and assistance programs. Through a series of personal interviews and an examination of program documentation, the case study explores the people, technology, and processes used to launch and maintain the Web site. The author arrives at five lessons learned, which are: (1) Establish a clear value proposition; (2) Develop shared risk and rewards; (3) Develop tangible results quickly; (4) Use creativity to get the word out; and (5) Don’t stop innovating.

Background

In late 2001, President George W. Bush unveiled his administration’s management agenda. A key feature of the agenda was the launching of 24 e-government (E-Gov) initiatives de-
signed to leverage technology to make government more efficient and effective. Among the 24 programs envisioned was a Web site that would consolidate dispersed information about government benefit and assistance programs into one easy-to-use Web site. Today, that vision is a reality with GovBenefits.gov, a Web site that connects citizens from all walks of life to 1,000 (390 federal and 610 state) benefit and assistance programs. The Web site consolidates information spread across 40 million federal government Web pages (Hernon, Dugan, & Shuler, 2003) to help connect citizens with their government. Launched in 2002, under the leadership of the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL), GovBenefits.gov is an inter-agency program that today brings together 16 federal agencies as partners (partners, funding partners) to provide citizens with a single point of entry to benefit and assistance programs.

GovBenefits.gov accomplishes its mission through collaboration and shared risk taking by using a formalized governance structure. The multi-agency governance system allows the DOL to share in the risks and rewards with the 16 federal funding partners, but more importantly enables the partners to have significant input into the direction of the program beyond just writing a check. Furthermore, over time the program has developed the technological infrastructure to move from a development-intensive effort to a state of normal operations or “maintenance mode” while preserving the ability to scale the program up or down through the use of flexible Web architecture. The impetus for GovBenefits was borne from the President’s vision to utilize e-government to make government more effective.

President’s Vision

During the summer of 2001, President George W. Bush’s Director of the Office of Management and Budget (OMB), Mitchell Daniels, began a process to identify strategic E-Gov opportunities as part of a broader effort to outline the specific elements of the President’s Management Agenda (PMA) (Office of Management and Budget, 2003). The PMA seeks to reform government to be more citizen-centered, less bureaucratic, and more market-driven. A focus of the PMA is the use of E-Gov technologies to achieve these goals. Through a task force dubbed the “Quick Silver Task Force”, a group of 80 senior federal officials collected information from numerous federal employees, citizens, and their own professional expertise to identify possible E-Gov initiatives. The initial information gathering process yielded more than 300 suggestions, including many E-Gov projects that were already underway or in the planning stages. From the list of 300 projects and ideas, an objective evaluation and scoring process reduced the number of initiatives to 24 that would become a part of the PMA (Office of Management and Budget, 2003). The President outlined his vision for e-government in a memo to federal agencies:

My administration’s vision for Government reform is guided by three principles. Government should be citizen-centered, results-oriented, and market-based. These principles have been woven into the five Government-wide reform goals outlined in my Administration’s Management Agenda: strategic management of human capital, budget and performance integration, competitive sourcing, expanded use of the Internet and computer resources to provide Government services (Electronic Government or E-Government), and improved financial management. Effective implementation of E-Government is important in making
Benchmarking Botswana’s e-Government Initiatives with WSIS Principles: A Review of Progress and Challenges
www.igi-global.com/chapter/benchmarking-botswana-government-initiatives-wsis/64855?camid=4v1a