Chapter XVI

The New York State Web Site: Accommodating Diversity Through a Distributed Management Structure

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Executive Summary

How does a very large and diverse state government with a long history of decentralized IT management go about creating a high-quality state-wide Web site? This case describes New York State’s distributed approach to Web site development as well as the strategies, benefits, weaknesses, and continuing challenges of a distributed Web management structure.

Background: About New York State and Its Government

New York is the third most populous state in the U.S. with about 19 million people in 2000, making it one of the biggest potential markets in the nation for e-government services.
pared to residents of other states, New Yorkers are generally well-educated and relatively affluent. The state’s population has a high proportion of computer owners and Internet users. At the same time, New York State government is a large and diverse enterprise that offers a wide variety of public information and services. This combination of factors suggests New York is an ideal location for comprehensive citizen-oriented Web services. However, despite a long history of IT applications in individual agencies that support government programs, New York is a latecomer to state-wide IT policy and management, including state-wide e-government. It was the last major state to create a central IT agency following decades of almost complete decentralization of IT functions and services.

From the inception of state government computing in the 1950s through the early 1990s, New York’s information technology policies, systems, and staff were almost entirely decentralized among scores of state agencies. Spending oversight was exercised by the Division of Budget for major new systems or hardware acquisitions, and the Office of General Services held most of the state’s telecommunications contracts and operated a data center that served some of the small- and medium-sized agencies. But, beyond these two aspects, individual state agencies had substantial autonomy with respect to how they chose and deployed information technology, how they designed and implemented systems, and how they staffed these functions.

The mid-1990s brought two major developments that led to dramatic changes in the way New York State government used and managed IT. First was the election of Governor George Pataki whose policy agenda emphasized making state government smaller, more efficient, “business-like”, and “business-friendly”. These policies led to the creation of organizations and activities that had significant influence over the future direction of IT management. The second development was the emergence of the World Wide Web with its promise of convenient public access to government information and services “anywhere, anytime”. State agencies embraced the Web as one way to streamline government operations as well as a means of increasing access to information and services.

**Setting the Stage**

When Governor Pataki took office in 1994, he began an evaluation process designed to bring the far-flung array of state IT assets under more standardized and centralized control. Among his early actions was a decision to consolidate more than three dozen agency-based data centers. Inevitably, this effort generated considerable concern on the part of the operating agencies and raised questions that went far beyond the data centers themselves to the heart of the relationship between decentralized agency operations and central coordination and control. These concerns included:

- What role will agencies play in planning, implementing, and evaluating the effort?
- On what basis will consolidation be designed?
- Which agencies will be affected and when?
An Overview of IT Outsourcing in Public-Sector Agencies
www.igi-global.com/chapter/overview-outsourcing-public-sector-agencies/21287?camid=4v1a