MEETING CONSTITUENT NEEDS THROUGH E-GOVERNANCE

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Abstract

Government agencies are adopting e-governance projects at an incredible pace to increase transparency, constituent participation, and collaboration. Although these projects have the potential to improve the relationships between constituents and their governments, there are major barriers to the successful implementation and management of such initiatives, including limited resources, the inherently inflexible nature of bureaucracy, and the involvement of politicians and public managers with minimal understanding of e-governance. To assist government agencies in overcoming these barriers, a project management model and set of best practices have been developed by applying the uses and gratifications communication theory to a synthesis of available research and reports on federal e-governance. This guidebook is designed to provide practitioners with the information and tools necessary to efficiently and effectively plan, implement, and manage e-governance projects to better serve their constituencies.
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Chapter 1: Introduction

The implementation of information and communication technologies by government agencies to provide information or public services to their constituents is commonly referred to as e-government. Noted benefits of e-government initiatives include long-term cost savings, organizational efficiency, service delivery effectiveness, and constituent satisfaction (Nasi and Frosini, 2010; Persson & Goldkuhl, 2010). Chun, Shulman, Sandoval, and Hovy (2010) describe four stages of e-government development: providing information on a website; allowing for simple web-based interactions; implementing online transaction services; and developing a two-way information flow between governments and constituents to enable collaborative decision-making. In a 2008 study of 1,357 American state and federal websites, the vast majority have completed the first three stages of e-government development, with 98% offering publications on their websites, 88% allowing e-mail contact through their websites, and 89% providing services that can be completed entirely online (West, 2008). The constituents have responded by utilizing these services, with 61% of all American adults having utilized a government website to obtain information or complete a transaction in 2009, and the typical user engaging in four e-government activities that year (Smith, 2010).

The fourth stage of e-government development, which accommodates dialogue between a government and its constituents, has been referred to as e-governance (Chun et al., 2010; D’Agostino, Schwester, Carrizales, & Melitski, 2011; Dadashzadeh, 2010). Methods of e-governance that have been implemented by local, state, and/or federal United States government agencies include: blogs with commenting capabilities; wikis; podcasting; content communities (i.e., Flickr and YouTube); online surveys and polls; social networking (i.e., Facebook and Twitter); and widgets (Chun et al., 2010; D’Agostino et al., 2011; Dadashzadeh, 2010). These e-
governance initiatives reinforce the informational services of e-government strategies but also provide greater opportunity for constituent understanding, involvement, participation, and collaboration (Dadashzadeh, 2010). This citizen engagement with government agencies benefits the citizens by providing a responsive democracy, and benefits the agencies by providing a channel for real-time public feedback to obtain an understanding of constituent needs and opinions (Dadashzadeh, 2010).

**Statement of Purpose**

Although e-governance projects have the potential to improve the relationships between constituents and their governments, there are major barriers to the successful implementation and management of such initiatives. These obstacles include: limited financial, technological, and human resources; the inherently inflexible nature of bureaucracy; and the involvement of politicians and public managers with minimal experience and/or understanding of information and communication technologies (Sarantis, Smithson, Charalabidis, & Askounis, 2010). These barriers are manifested in government agencies’ failure to allocate necessary resources, inability to be both proactive and reactive to constantly evolving technological trends, and uninformed and/or unrealistic project planning. In addition, there is a scarcity of academic research in e-governance that presents challenges to practitioners seeking guidance in this burgeoning field. Findings from e-government research inform the study of e-governance, but the participatory nature of e-governance is unique and requires special consideration. This project aims to provide such consideration by synthesizing the academic research on federal e-government with e-governance information derived from government reports and directives, independent research center data, and the limited academic research on e-governance. This comprehensive examination of e-governance culminates in the development of a project management model and
an actionable set of best practices for application by organizations seeking to initiate or improve their efforts in e-governance to better serve their constituencies.

**Definition of Terms Used**

A few key terms are utilized throughout this document, and their definitions in the context of this project are clarified here.

**E-government.** The E-Government Act of 2002 provides the following definition of e-government:

“Electronic Government” means the use by the Government of web-based Internet applications and other information technologies, combined with processes that implement these technologies, to (A) enhance the access to and delivery of Government information and services to the public, other agencies, and other Government entities; or (B) bring about improvements in Government operations that may include effectiveness, efficiency, service quality, or transformation.

For the purposes of this project, the term “e-government” refers to the government’s delivery of information and services to constituents utilizing technologies such as websites.

**E-governance.** E-governance is a component of e-government in that it utilizes web-based technologies to provide information and services to constituents. However, for the purposes of this project, it is referred to as a separate entity because e-governance has a specific goal of utilizing these technologies to create an environment of constituent participation and collaboration with government agencies (Chun et al., 2010). E-governance focuses on providing two-way communication channels between governments and citizens, utilizing technologies such as social media.
Social media. Social media is defined by Kaplan and Hanlein as “a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of User Generated Content” (2010). Web 2.0 is a term that describes a shift in Internet usage from individual content development to collaborative content development (i.e., from Encyclopedia Britannica Online to Wikipedia); User Generated Content refers to content that is created outside of an institutional or commercial context and published online (i.e., Internet users posting personal opinions on a website) (Kaplan & Hanlein, 2010). The list of social media platforms and their categorization is continually evolving, but for the purposes of this project, social media refers to social networks (i.e., Facebook, Twitter, and Google+) and content communities (i.e., YouTube and Flickr).

Organization of Remaining Chapters

The remainder of this document is divided into four chapters. Chapter 2 defines the philosophical assumptions and theoretical basis that guide the author’s approach to e-governance, provides a review of relevant literature that provides context for the topic, and establishes the rationale for utilizing this research as the basis for the project. In Chapter 3, the scope and methodology for this project are outlined, and ethical considerations addressed. The project itself, a document that provides a project management model and best practices for e-governance for government practitioners, is presented in Chapter 4. The final chapter identifies the project’s limitations and provides recommendations for further research into e-governance, and concludes with a discussion of the implications of the project.
Chapter 2. Review of the Literature

Philosophical Assumptions and Theoretical Basis

**Philosophical assumptions.** American philosopher John Dewey asserted that “the foundation of democracy is faith in the capacities of human nature; faith in human intelligence, and in the power of pooled and cooperative experience” (as cited in Fott, 1991, p. 34). According to Dewey, democratic politics require that citizens be engaged and involved, which is only possible when government is open and transparent (Barber, 1994). The participatory democracy that Dewey envisioned is contingent upon communication between the government and the constituency: sharing of experience, discussion of concerns, and collaboration in problem-solving (Shields, 2003). Recent literature echoes Dewey’s sentiment, asserting that authentic democracy is characterized by the role of citizen as collaborative partner in government activity, enabled by the availability of two-way communication channels (Abelson, Forest, Eyles, Smith, Martin, & Gauvin, 2003; Vigoda, 2002). In order to operate in the best interest of constituents, government administrators must not only provide these channels but also listen responsively to the information, opinions, and ideas they deliver (Stivers, 1994).

This philosophy of democracy was legitimized by America’s federal government when, in 2009, newly elected President Barack Obama issued a Memorandum on Transparency and Open Government that established his administration’s goals of transparency, public participation, and private sector collaboration (Obama, 2009). The Open Government Directive subsequently issued by the Office of Management and Budget outlined a process for fulfilling those goals, which relied heavily on web-based information and communication technologies (Orszag, 2009). The use of information technology by government agencies to improve constituent services was initiated by the E-Government Act of 2002 (Bolten, 2003), but
advancements in web-based communication technologies allowed the 2009 directive to extend further into the participatory realm of government. Although e-government would still be necessary to provide access to information and services, the 2009 directive represented a broadening of the federal government’s focus to include citizen participation in e-government by allowing constituents to “contribute ideas and expertise so that their government can make policies with the benefit of information that is widely dispersed in society” (Orszag, 2009, p. 1). This participatory function is central to e-governance and has the potential to transform government from agency-centric to citizen-centric (Bertot, Jaeger, Munson, & Glaisyer, 2010; June, Hong, & Sung-Min, 2011; Osimo, 2008; Seifert, 2003).

Theoretical basis. The study of e-governance requires a theoretical perspective that considers its innovative web-based communication medium as well as its user-centric focus. With an audience that actively participates in its content consumption and is selective of the delivery method, e-governance is best examined through the lens of the uses and gratifications (U&G) communication theory. The U&G theory recognizes that mass media audiences are not simply acted upon by the media, but are instead acting upon the media by choosing to engage with it in order to reach their own goals (Katz, Blumler, & Gurevitch, 1973). These audiences are users of e-governance as well.

The U&G theory asserts that audiences interact with a medium for three distinct purposes; the first two of these are content gratification (derived from engaging with the medium’s message) and process gratification (derived from engaging with the medium itself) (Cutler & Danowski, 1980). The third purpose is social gratification, which is derived from communicating and interacting with others and is unique to the Internet as a mass media tool due to its transactional nature (Stafford, Stafford, & Schkade, 2004). While all three purposes are
applicable to the study of e-governance, this final purpose is uniquely relevant because it addresses the interactive and participatory functions of e-governance.

Application of the U&G theory will assist in determining from the available research why constituents choose e-governance as a source of information, services, and communication from government agencies, and will also provide insights into the gratifications that constituents seek and receive from this medium. This understanding of constituents’ motivations for and expectations from engaging with e-governance will provide a foundation for the development of best practices for government agencies to best utilize this communication medium in the effort to serve their constituents’ needs.

The Literature

The trend among governments to utilize information and communication technologies to deliver information and services has exploded since e-government was first introduced in the 1990s. By 2013, all national governments and the majority of subnational governments (i.e., state and local) had adopted e-government around the world (Norris & Reddick, 2013). By 2008, at least 24,000 United States government websites were online (Federal Web Managers Council, 2008b). E-governance adoption has also grown at an incredible pace since Web 2.0 technologies became available in the 2000s, with 66% of all government agencies in the United States utilizing social media by 2010 (Human Capital Institute, 2010). Scholarly research on e-government beginning around the year 2000 was primarily optimistic about the opportunities this innovation would provide, and anticipated that it would be a transformative force toward direct citizen oversight of government (e-democracy) (Norris & Reddick, 2013). Although e-government has not yet transformed government operations as predicted, it has begun to reshape them, and it still presents opportunities for further advancement toward a more participatory
In order to move forward with e-government and e-governance initiatives, it is necessary to look back at the motivations and anticipated benefits for both government agencies and constituents, as well as the challenges these initiatives have presented. The actual impact of these initiatives on the relationship between government and constituents must then be considered, and then a plan to meet expectations and overcome barriers can be developed.

Motivations and anticipated benefits for government agencies. The motivations for government agencies to embrace e-government and e-governance are depicted quite differently in government reports versus scholarly research. Reports produced by the Federal Web Managers Council (2008b; 2008c) cite primarily constituent-oriented motivations such as providing access to information, improving the efficiency of service delivery, engaging citizens by allowing users to provide input and receive feedback, removing disability and language barriers, and accomplishing agency missions. Scholarly research tends to focus on more agency-centric motivations, although there is disagreement as to whether these motivations are generated internally (by the agency or its management) or externally (by its environment or its constituents). McNeal, Tolbert, Mossberger, and Dotterweich (2003) analyzed e-government innovation and found that internal factors such as legislative professionalism and political ideology were highly influential in government agencies’ adoption of e-government. This study also concludes that citizen-centric motivations such as constituent demand and even access to the Internet are not influential in the adoption of e-government (McNeal et al., 2003). Another study that identifies agency-centric motivations is that by Jun and Weare (2010), but unlike the McNeal et al. study, this research asserts that e-government adoption is motivated by external forces, such as increases in the complexity of the technological environment and pressure to mimic the activities of like organizations. However, some research has supported government
claims of citizen-centric motivations; in a 2011 survey of local United States government agencies, Norris and Reddick (2012) found that providing constituents with access to government information, staff, and elected officials were the most frequently cited reasons for providing e-government services.

Although there is some disparity between accounts of the motivation for engaging in e-government and e-governance, the potential benefits to government agencies are quite consistent across government reports and scholarly research. Perhaps the most attractive advantage to government agencies is cost savings in providing information and services to constituents. United States government reports such as the Executive Office of the President of the United States Office of Management and Budget’s Report to Congress on the Benefits of the President’s E-government Initiatives (2013) provide a thorough explanation of cost savings across federal agencies, from decreasing labor hours in the Department of Housing and Urban Development to generating leads for the Department of Commerce’s exporter base with social media. Increased efficiency through e-government is another attractive benefit to government agencies, as it a major factor in the reduction in costs of service provision (Seifert, 2003). Although these advantages of e-government and e-governance serve citizens in their effective use of tax revenue, other benefits are more evidently constituent-oriented. These benefits – transparency, participation, and collaboration – are those specifically mentioned in the 2009 Open Government Directive (Obama, 2009; Orszag, 2009). Obama (2009) asserted that these aspects of e-governance would “ensure the public trust… strengthen our democracy and promote efficiency and effectiveness in Government.”

Motivations and anticipated benefits for constituents. E-governance allows constituents to become active participants in government operations as “prosumers” – both
consumers and producers of content related to the government (June et al., 2011). This role is empowering for citizens; not only do they have access to information, they are able to share their understanding and opinions about it with the government agencies and, perhaps even more empowering, the entire world of social media users if they choose. This ability of citizens to access information and voice their judgments of it pressures government agencies to be more accountable for their decisions (Chun et al., 2010; June et al., 2011). For social media users, there is no need for the mass media broker that was once their source for information – they have themselves become the mass media. An incredible example of this phenomenon is when, on May 6, 2011, Twitter users learned of Osama bin Laden’s death a full hour before President Obama’s official announcement or any media coverage. A tweet from a secretary of Donald Rumsfeld on his personal account with only 1,000 followers broke the news and fueled a conversation engaging tens of thousands of Twitter users, including members of the media. By the time the President read his address, Twitter already knew what he was going to say (SocialFlow, 2011).

The influence that e-governance users possess is not limited to their ability to consume, produce, and share information; it extends to an ability to shape government actions. Political agendas are no longer defined only by lobbyists and special interest groups but are also guided by individual citizens, leading to “‘open sourced’ or ‘crowd sourced’ policy decisions” (June et al., 2011, p. 128). President Obama’s administration provides a direct forum for constituent input on policy making through its online petition system, “We the People,” which was launched in September 2011. As of September 2013, there were 10.2 million users of the site with nearly 15 million total petition signatures. Petitions require a threshold of signatures to receive an official response from the White House, and more than 200 have done so (Compton, 2013). The service requires that petitions seek “to address a problem, support or oppose a proposal, or otherwise
change or continue federal government policy or actions” (The White House, 2013), and open petitions as of February 2014 range from recognizing endometriosis as a disability to stopping the culling of stray dogs in Sochi, Russia (The White House, 2014). The petition service is fully integrated with social media, encouraging users to “Promote this Petition” with Facebook and Twitter buttons on each petition page. This innovative service empowers constituents to generate changes in policy, connect with other citizens who share their goal, and involve their social media connections in the process. It eliminates the barriers of time and space to allow constituent involvement in ways never possible before e-governance (Bertot et al., 2010).

**Challenges and limitations for government agencies.** The multitude of benefits of e-government and e-governance are not without challenges. For government agencies, many of these challenges are inherent to their bureaucratic nature. Sarantis et al. (2010) compile ten such barriers from previous research: a lack of skilled professional personnel; formal controls and inflexible decision making processes; a need to satisfy multiple stakeholders with frequently conflicting objectives; a risk of losing public trust with project failure; a lack of clear goals due to the imposition of politics; complex project dimensions with “technical, managerial, political, social, cultural, and legal factors” (p. 306); an inability to plan for the future due to frequent leadership changes in elections; a lack of cooperation between organizations to establish best practices; laws and regulations that fail to keep pace with innovation; and the influence of political agendas that shape initiatives for the benefit of elected officials. Computer security, privacy, and information archival are also concerns for government agencies that are documented in scholarly research and government reports alike (Bertot et al., 2010; Bertot, Jaeger, & Hansen, 2012; Federal Web Managers Council, 2008c; Seifert, 2003). In addition, the regulatory policies of government agencies are frequently too outdated for application to e-
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governance, contain gaps or ambiguities that make their application unclear, or actually conflict with the terms of use for e-governance tools like social media websites (Bertot et al., 2010; Bertot et al., 2012; Federal Web Managers Council, 2008c; Sarantis et al., 2010; Seifert, 2003). Bertot et al. (2012) provides an overview of e-governance issues not adequately addressed by current policies, including consistent and continual access to social media sites for government agencies and constituents, information archival on social media sites, and privacy and security concerns on social media sites. However, perhaps the most critical challenge for government agencies is the most important benefit for constituents – active citizen participation. E-governance allows and encourages an unprecedented level of involvement for individual constituents, and this requires a paradigm shift in the processes of government agencies in order to not only collect, analyze, and acknowledge citizen input, but also to incorporate that input into decision and policy making to fulfill the goal of a participatory democracy (Bertot et al., 2010; Chun et al., 2010; June et al., 2011).

Challenges and limitations for constituents. Constituents are largely unaware of the challenges that government agencies face in implementing and administering e-governance initiatives, but many citizens encounter barriers of their own. In 2011, the U.S. General Services Administration’s .gov Reform Task Force hosted an online “national dialogue” to survey constituents, federal employees, and industry experts in an effort to improve federal e-government. The feedback included recommendations to improve content, service delivery, and user experience; facilitate simpler search for information; ensure full integration of websites with social media; and provide universal access in terms of access to technology (.gov Reform Task Force, 2011).
The matter of universal access is perhaps the most critical challenge for e-governance because it primarily excludes populations that are most serviced by the government, such as older Americans and those with lower incomes, lower education levels, or disabilities (Seifert, 2003). This issue is commonly referred to as the “digital divide,” and it is characterized by two problems: an access divide and a skills divide (Bèlanger & Carter, 2009). According to a 2011 Pew Internet & American Life survey, of the 21% of American adults who did not use the Internet, 25% stated that it was due to cost or lack of availability (access divide), and 20% stated that it was due to usability issues (skills divide) (Zickuhr & Smith, 2012). Although there is disagreement among policymakers and the public as to who is responsible for eliminating the digital divide (Epstein, Nisbet, & Gillespie, 2011), the government must be involved as this problem impacts the potential for a participatory democracy that includes all constituents.

**Evaluating impacts to the government-constituent relationship.** Much scholarly research on e-government and e-governance focuses on how these initiatives impact the relationship between the government and its constituents. This research consistently asserts that the goals of these initiatives include increasing citizens’ perceptions of trust, transparency, openness, accessibility, and accountability of government agencies, ultimately resulting in greater satisfaction with government (Morgenson, VanAmburg, & Mithas, 2011; Pina, Torres, & Royo, 2010; Tolbert & Mossberger, 2006). These studies also frequently seek to analyze how successful government agencies have been in these efforts; however, there is little consistency in researchers’ findings.

On a global scale, the United Nations E-Government Survey 2012 ranked the United States fifth among 190 countries in its e-government development (dropping from second in a 2010 survey), and third in its e-participation (rising from sixth in a 2010 survey). This study
performs a controlled, yet citizen-centric assessment of national websites to compare the
development of e-government worldwide (United Nations, 2012). Success of American e-
government initiatives is also documented in a report from the Pew Internet and American Life
Project utilizing survey data from 2009 (Smith, 2010). This report indicated a generally positive
correlation between constituents’ use of e-government and their attitude toward government,
particularly with regard to openness and accountability; however, citizen trust of government
was not found to be influenced (Smith, 2010).

Pew Internet and American Life Project survey data is also utilized by Tolbert and
Mossberger in a 2006 study, and although their data was gathered in 2001, they identify similar
successes: government website visitation leads to increased perceptions of transparency,
accessibility, and responsiveness. However, as in the Smith report (2010), Tolbert and
Mossberger find no relationship between citizens’ use of e-government and trust of government.
With regard to e-governance, Tolbert and Mossberger (2006) assert that e-participation is vital to
improving citizens’ attitude toward government, and Smith (2010) demonstrates that
governmental participation in social media positively contributes to constituents’ perception of
openness and accessibility.

However, other studies conclude that e-government has been generally unsuccessful in
improving constituents’ attitudes toward government, including those by Morgeson et al. (2011)
and Pina et al. (2010). Morgeson et al. (2011) apply a correlation model to constituent data
obtained from the 2008 American Customer Satisfaction Index to determine whether the use of
e-government services contributes to citizens’ satisfaction, trust, and confidence in government.
Their findings indicate that e-government initiatives do not improve citizens’ perceptions of
satisfaction with or trust in government, although these initiatives do appear to increase their
confidence in the future performance of the specific agency with which they interacted.

With a different approach, Pina et al. (2010) analyze the information and services provided on government websites to assess their efforts toward accountability, transparency, interactivity, usability, and web maturity. They identify five stages of implementation efforts to reach these goals, ranging from simply providing information on a website to providing fully integrated online service delivery and opportunities for interaction with citizens that influence organizational decision-making in a citizen-focused environment (Pina et al., 2010). The final stage represents the transition from monologue to dialogue; from e-government to e-governance. Their findings indicate that although the majority of government websites have reached the first stage of implementation, very few have reached subsequent stages, with the final two stages yet unattained (Pina et al., 2010).

Like Morgeson et al. (2011), Pina et al. (2010) conclude that e-government has not met its goals pertaining to improving constituents’ attitudes toward government, and Pina et al. specifically point to a paucity of e-governance initiatives as a barrier to facilitating these goals. However, both Morgeson et al. (2011) and Pina et al. (2010) concede that e-government innovations do have the potential to improve constituent-government relationships, even if that potential has not yet been realized.

The variations in judgment of e-government and e-governance successes are to be expected, given the relatively short period of time researchers have had to study them. Factors further complicating the assessment process include: the diversity of methods for collecting and analyzing data; the numerous disciplines and theories that can be applied to the topic; the distinctions between different levels, types, and locations of governments; and the rapid pace of change in the technologies on which e-government and e-governance rely (Morgeson et al.,
Rationale

Scholarly research and government reports have demonstrated that the usage of e-government and e-governance initiatives to serve constituent needs presents notable benefits and formidable challenges (Chun et al., 2010; Godwin, Campbell, Levy, & Bounds, 2008; Zhao, Scavarda, & Waxin, 2012). E-government has quickly become less of a luxury and more of an expectation for government agencies (Chua, Goh, & Ang, 2012), and academic research has examined this tool through the lenses of communication (Thomas & Streib, 2003), information technology (Lai & Pires, 2010), and public management (Persson & Goldkuhl, 2010). These studies have explored the extent of e-government initiatives and analyzed their successes and failures from both theoretical and practical standpoints.

A great deal of this research has centered on the information and service offerings of government websites, which are the foundation of e-government and have been utilized since the early 1990s. This bounty of research is justified, as 85% of American adults use the Internet, and 82% of them used a government website in 2009 (Pew Internet & American Life Project, 2013; Smith, 2010). Significantly less research has focused on the participatory function served by the newer field of e-governance, which accommodates dialogue between the government and its constituents and contributes to transparency and collaboration. Although the usage of e-governance channels (i.e., social media) is lower than that of e-government channels (i.e., websites), nearly one-third of online American adults – equating to more than 53 million people – utilized e-governance channels in 2009 (Smith, 2010; United States Census Bureau, 2012).

The e-governance research that has been performed has focused primarily on its large-scale benefits and challenges, but provides little guidance for practitioners in government
agencies in their efforts to connect with constituents with e-governance tools. In fact, a deficit of trained and qualified personnel is a documented barrier to the successful execution of e-government initiatives (Sarantis et al., 2010). The potential for e-governance to transform democracy itself demands that this innovation be considered important enough for government organizations to seek an understanding of the resources, activities, products, and results necessary for their e-governance initiatives to be successful. This project aims to provide such understanding by synthesizing available research on federal e-government and e-governance to develop an actionable set of best practices for application by government organizations at all levels seeking to initiate or improve their efforts in e-governance to better serve their constituents’ needs.

**Design Questions**

In consideration of the literature and the demonstrated need for research that provides a source of guidance to e-governance practitioners, this project is designed to address the following questions:

1.) What constituent needs does federal e-governance serve?

2.) How have federal e-governance initiatives implemented to date effectively served constituent needs?

3.) What are actionable best practices for practitioners in all levels of government to utilize in their planning and execution of e-governance initiatives to serve constituent needs?
Chapter 3: Scope and Methodology

The Scope of the Project

The focus of this project is the e-governance initiatives of United States federal government agencies. Although the findings of this project may be useful to practitioners of e-governance at all levels of government, research not including federal e-governance has been excluded from the project. Data collected includes quantitative and qualitative research published since 2003 regarding federal government e-governance initiatives. As e-governance has been considered a component of e-government (Chun et al., 2010), applicable research on e-government is included as well. Relevant research for this study includes: communication-focused scholarly research published in peer-reviewed journals; data and reports generated by independent research centers; government-issued directives and reports; and government agencies’ internal e-governance procedures. Data sources were located utilizing electronic academic databases and federal government agency websites.

Methodology of the Project

The method for this project is evaluation research, which is generally utilized to understand how a program implemented by an organization is working toward and/or meeting its intended goals (Frechtling, 2007). Because e-governance is an ongoing, continually evolving program, a combination of formative and summative evaluation research is being performed. The former examines the effectiveness of e-governance in how its process is functioning, and the latter determines whether its goals have been reached. For the purpose of developing best practices, a logic model is developed and applied to examine the relationships between the resources, strategies, products, and results of e-governance as documented in recent literature in
order to clarify its goals, examine its effectiveness to date, and provide recommendations for its improvement.

This project performs a meta-synthesis, which is an interpretive approach that seeks to generate new insight from existing inter-related research (Walsh & Downe, 2005). The current research, reports, and agency practices have been acquired and synthesized to establish what e-governance initiatives have been performed and how constituents have used them. This information has then been analyzed through the lens of the uses and gratifications theory to define and evaluate its effectiveness. The findings have been utilized to develop a set of best practices for practitioner application.

**Ethical Considerations**

The meta-synthesis is a secondary research approach that does not include research participants, so there are no ethical considerations for participant involvement. However, there is an ethical responsibility to acquire, report, and analyze primary research in an open and transparent manner (Walsh and Downe, 2005). There are also ethical considerations for evaluation research (Neuman, 2011); however, these are focused on contracted research, which is not the motivation of this study. Still, because the author of this research does work in digital communications for a government agency, special care will be taken to ensure that this professional affiliation does not interfere with the accurate and objective reporting of findings.
Chapter 4: The Project

Project Description

There are a number of challenges to government agencies in the effective implementation and usage of e-governance, including a lack of established best practices that can benefit e-governance practitioners at all levels of government, and an absence of project management guidelines that provide practitioners with a model for planning, executing, and evaluating e-governance initiatives (Sarantis et al., 2010). This project serves to explicitly address these two challenges by developing a set of best practices in conjunction with a project management model in order to enable practitioners to streamline and improve their processes. The best practices also provide guidance to practitioners in overcoming other challenges in e-governance, such as balancing multiple stakeholder needs, defining project goals, providing universal access to information, ensuring high-quality content and user experience, and developing processes and systems to manage constituent feedback.

This document is intended for use in managing e-governance projects involving third-party tools, such as social networks (i.e., Facebook, Twitter, Google+) and content communities (i.e., YouTube and Flickr), collectively referred to as “social media.” Government agencies that are able to invest substantial financial and human resources into e-governance may develop customized tools to serve the agency’s and its constituency’s specific needs; examples of these tools include President Obama’s administration’s “We the People” online petition system and the City of Boston’s “Citizens Connect” concern reporting mobile application. (See Federal Web Managers Council, 2008b, for more examples of customized e-governance tools.) However, for organizations with more limited resources and/or those that are first entering the field of e-governance, third-party tools are the most likely e-governance tools to be utilized. Although
much of the document references resources for federal agencies, it is designed to be useful for practitioners at all levels of government.

The project management model and best practices report is included in this document as an appendix entitled, “Meeting Constituent Needs through E-governance: A Project Management Model and Best Practices.”
Chapter 5: Summaries and Conclusions

Limitations of the Project

Because e-government, e-governance, and social media are continually evolving due to technological advancements and shifts in usage trends, many best practices developed for these initiatives may only be accurate and pertinent for a short period of time. While efforts were made to provide guidance in this project that is general enough to remain relevant for the foreseeable future, it is impossible to predict how or when the landscape of e-governance will change, especially when third-party platforms such as social media are involved. Therefore, the applicability of the best practices presented in this project may be limited over time.

In addition, because these best practices were designed to be general enough for all levels of government to utilize them, they do not address considerations specific to certain types of agencies or organizational structures. Some agencies may require more bureaucratic approval processes, systematic oversight, or formalized documentation than are described in this project. There may also be additional legal or regulatory considerations for the use of e-governance tools in some agencies, and this project does not address the ambiguities and gaps in current legislation that impact e-governance.

Further Recommendations

The ever-changing landscape of e-governance demands ongoing research that keeps practitioners informed of current tools, trends, and applications. Best practices cannot be static; they must be continually reevaluated and revised to provide useful guidance. There should be a concerted effort by e-governance practitioners and researchers to develop and maintain easily accessible, well-organized sets of best practices for both general e-governance tasks (i.e., allocating resources and developing policy) and the utilization of specific tools (i.e., Facebook
and YouTube). Although the Federal Web Managers Council’s HowTo.gov website attempts to provide e-governance resources, there is very little consistency in the types or depth of content provided, and the best practices have been developed by specific agencies and are not widely applicable. In addition, much of the content is more than three years old, which is extremely outdated for the fast-moving field of e-governance. The United States General Services Administration Office of Citizen Services and Innovative Technologies also provides a platform for e-governance collaboration, DigitalGov.gov, and although the information provided there is more current than HowTo.gov, the site has a distinct focus on federal government, since it is managed by a federal agency. A more collaborative and inclusive resource is necessary to provide comprehensive guidance to e-governance practitioners at all levels of government.

Practitioners would also benefit from further external research like that of the Pew Internet & American Life Project (Smith, 2010) that provides data for the public’s usage of e-governance tools, as well as further academic research into the actual influence of e-governance on government-constituent relationships, like that of Morgenson et al. (2011), Pina et al. (2010), and Tolbert and Mossberger (2006). In addition, the field of e-governance would benefit from additional research employing the uses and gratifications communication theory, which could examine why constituents choose to utilize e-governance tools instead of or in addition to other government information and/or communication channels. This research would provide government agencies with a greater understanding of how e-governance works to meet the needs of citizens and how they can maximize its effectiveness.

Conclusions

E-governance provides unique opportunities for government agencies to inform, engage, and interact with constituents. It can contribute to agency missions, empower citizens, and help
create a more participatory democracy. However, e-governance presents many challenges to government agencies, not the least of which are the tasks of thoroughly planning and effectively managing e-governance projects. There is a need for resources that provide guidance for e-governance practitioners to overcome these challenges. The best practices presented in this project provide such a resource, guiding practitioners through the process of determining the availability of organizational resources, planning and executing an e-government project, measuring its usage and collecting constituent feedback, and evaluating how the project has met its goals. These best practices also encourage practitioners to focus on constituent needs throughout the process in order to make e-governance tools attractive and useful for citizens. Finally, they provide a model for the development of future best practices documents, which will be necessary as the e-governance field rapidly evolves and changes the dynamics of government-constituent interactions.
References


Meeting Constituent Needs through E-governance

A Project Management Model and Best Practices

Report Prepared by:
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Introduction

E-government is the utilization of web-based technologies by government agencies to provide information and services to constituents (E-Government Act of 2002). E-governance is an extension of e-government that has a specific goal of utilizing these technologies to create an environment of constituent participation and collaboration with government agencies (Chun, Shulman, Sandoval, & Hovy, 2010). E-governance focuses on providing two-way communication channels between governments and citizens, utilizing technologies such as social media.

E-governance adoption has grown at an incredible pace since Web 2.0 technologies became available in the 2000s, with 66% of all government agencies in the United States utilizing social media by 2010 (Human Capital Institute, 2010). In 2009, nearly one-third of online American adults – equating to more than 53 million people – were utilizing e-governance channels to receive information from and/or communicate with government agencies (Smith, 2010; United States Census Bureau, 2012).

Government agencies are aware of this growth and recognize the importance of e-governance channels in their communication strategies. In a 2014 GovDelivery survey of government communication professionals, 71% reported that increasing the size of their agencies’ digital audience was a priority, and 71% also reported that social media was a digital communication channel they would focus on in 2014 – more than email, text messaging, and phone communication (2014).

Unfortunately, there are a number of challenges government agencies face in their e-governance efforts, including coping with bureaucratic limitations, following unclear regulatory policies, providing universal access, and addressing privacy and information archival issues (Bertot, Jaeger, Munson, & Glaisyer, 2010; Bertot, Jaeger, & Hansen, 2012; Federal Web Managers Council, 2008c; Sarantis, Smithson, Charalabidis, & Askounis, 2010; Seifert, 2003).
Two additional challenges to government agencies are the ones that this report explicitly addresses: a lack of established best practices that can benefit e-governance practitioners at all levels of government, and an absence of project management guidelines that incorporate the needs of multiple stakeholders and provide practitioners with a model for planning, executing, and evaluating e-governance initiatives (Sarantis et al., 2010).

In providing best practices in conjunction with a project management model, this report will enable you, the e-governance practitioner, to streamline and improve your processes, allowing you to focus on meeting your constituent needs through e-governance.

**About the Report**

This report is intended for use by government employees of all levels who are charged with managing e-governance projects involving third-party tools, such as social networks (i.e., Facebook, Twitter, Google+) and content communities (i.e., YouTube and Flickr), collectively referred to as “social media.”

These little birdies will lead you to more helpful resources throughout this report.

**About the Author**

Morgan Drdak is the Digital Communications Manager for the Forest Preserve District of Will County, Illinois, and has worked in local government since 2002. She prepared this report as part of her capstone project for a Master's degree in Communication and Leadership Studies from Gonzaga University, under the guidance of Dr. Heather Crandall and Dr. Barbra Kingsley.

She speaks softly, but carries a big megaphone.
Project Management Model and Best Practices

With the rapid growth of social media technologies and governments’ adoption of them, there have been many agencies that have jumped into e-governance headfirst without adequately planning the initiatives. Even if this scenario describes your agency, there is always a need to plan for the future of your existing projects, or, if you are embarking on new projects, implement a thorough planning process for them prior to their execution. A project management model can provide a useful starting point for projects as well as guide you through their management, measurement, and evaluation.

The project management model that follows delineates four stages in the process of e-governance: resources, activities, products, and results. Although the model is depicted as a linear process, the dynamic nature of e-governance requires frequent revisiting of previous stages. Reaching the results stage is not the end of the line; even if there is success in the results stage, the resources stage must be revisited to ensure continued success. The activities and products stages will be ongoing throughout continuation of the project.

![Diagram of project management model](image)

*Figure 1. E-governance project management model (based on Frechtling, 2007, and Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2011). This figure illustrates the four stages in the process of managing e-governance projects.*

With the project management model in hand, you have the roadmap to success. However, each stage of the process involves a set of tasks that require special consideration. The following sections will provide best practices for these tasks in each stage of the process (resources, activities, products, and results).
Resource 1: Organizational Culture

A critical resource in e-governance projects is the organizational culture of the agency and the potential for project buy-in from management (Federal Web Managers Council, 2008b; Kavanaugh, Fox, Sheetz, Yang, Li, Shoemaker, Natsev, & Xie, 2012; Partnership for Public Service, 2013; Sarantis et al., 2010). Take some time to consider and honestly answer the following questions, in consultation with trusted managers or co-workers if necessary:

- Does your agency’s leadership and staff embrace change?
- Are your agency’s leadership and staff committed to transparency and accountability?
- Is there a shared goal among your agency’s leadership and staff to provide responsive constituent service, including incorporating citizen opinions and ideas into policy development?

If the answer to these questions is yes, celebrate! Your agency is primed for an e-governance project, because e-governance will bring change to the organization, including an increase in transparency, accountability, and constituents’ expectations for responsive service. If the answer to any of the questions is no, take a deep breath and prepare for some resistance in the planning of the e-governance project. If the organizational culture is not a good fit for e-governance, the project is at a high risk for failure unless there is a shift toward adaptability, openness, and customer service (Sarantis et al., 2010). This kind of culture change is typically most successful when initiated and enforced from management,
but e-governance projects and the associated education that you can provide to agency leaders may encourage the necessary shift. Consideration of the culture and its adaptability to e-governance will allow you to formulate your planning efforts and management education efforts appropriately, as will be further discussed in the activities stage.

**Resource 2: Staff**

Staffing is a key resource in e-governance projects, not only in terms of the availability of staff to perform the necessary work, but also in terms of their qualifications to do so (Sarantis et al., 2010). E-governance management requires a somewhat unique combination of knowledge and skills in information technology and public relations, as well as access to information and authority to speak on behalf of the agency. Again, take some time to consider and answer the following questions, in consultation with trusted managers or co-workers if necessary:

- Do any current agency staff members have this combination of skills, access, and authority, and could their positions be adjusted to incorporate this work?
- Could the workload be divided among staff, possibly across departments?
- Alternatively, is there a possibility of creating a new position to manage e-governance initiatives?

A potential model for these staffing needs may be found in the management of your agency’s most prominent digital communication tool, its website.

- What positions are involved in the development of the website and its content?
- What processes are in place to ensure that accurate and consistent messages are communicated through the website?

Similar staffing and coordination could be applied to an e-governance project. Although you may not have the authority to allocate staffing resources, it is important that you have an understanding of potential staffing and some recommendations prepared for your presentation to management in the activities stage of the project.
Resource 3: Funding

A common misconception of e-governance tools is that they are free. Although third-party tools like social media sites do not currently charge users for accounts, there are a number of costs associated with developing content for and maintaining these tools, as well as integrating them and other e-governance tools into other communication channels; therefore, funding for e-governance projects is an important consideration (Kavanaugh et al., 2012).

The human resources necessary for an e-governance project may be the most costly aspect of the project, depending on how current staffing can be adjusted or if new staff can be added to execute it. Costs for initial training and continuing education to keep pace with evolving technology and trends must also be considered.

The planning period for an e-governance initiative is an ideal time to touch base with constituents and gather data regarding their communication needs, and efforts to complete this task may also require funding. A thorough citizen survey is one option that can be quite costly; another option is the utilization of constituent focus groups, and the cost for this kind of data collection depends upon whether the work is done internally, in partnership with an external organization such as a university, or with the assistance of a paid consultant.

There may also be costs associated with integrating e-governance tools into your agency’s website, such as incorporating widgets or social media toolbars on the site. Additional funding may be required for content development if the projects include multimedia such as photos or videos. Cameras, computer hardware and software, and/or contractor funding may be necessary.

There are also fees for advertising on third-party social media sites, and you will want to promote your e-governance initiatives through other printed or digital communication channels, so those associated costs should be considered as well.
Again, even if you do not have the authority to establish budgets, your presentation to management in the activities stage of the project must address the funding needs for the project. Although you will not have a definitive price tag for the project, it is necessary for management to understand that it will consume some financial resources, and the amount of those resources will depend, in part, on how robust the project and its content will be.
Activity 1: Setting Goals

The first and most important task in executing an e-governance project is establishing the goals that the initiative is intended to achieve (Sarantis et al., 2010). If your agency is considering an e-governance project, there is ideally already some goal in mind, but that is not always the case. (Perhaps an elected official simply said, “Other places are using this ‘Tweeter’ thing, so do that.”) With or without a thoughtful objective motivating the project, a thorough and carefully considered set of goals is necessary to guide its planning, maintenance, and evaluation. The following sections will help you get into the goal setting mindset, assess constituent needs, and assess agency needs and elicit buy-in for the project from organizational management.

Activity 1a: Get Into the Goal Setting Mindset

Start the goal setting process with the premise that the project goals should be constituent-oriented and support your agency’s mission and its overall communication strategy and/or marketing plan (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2011; Partnership for Public Service, 2013). Also keep in mind that although not all goals may be measurable, there should be some measurable aspects in order to later evaluate how successful the project has been in reaching the goals. (Measurement is addressed in more detail in the results stage.) In addition, remember that the project goals should include the broader goals of e-governance: increasing transparency, participation, and constituent trust, and incorporating feedback into policy.
Examples of goals for which e-governance is appropriate may include raising awareness about your agency’s programs, increasing use of your agency’s services, and/or improving customer service. For measurable goals, benchmarks should ideally be set to aid in evaluation of the project’s success; for example, increasing visitation to a specific program’s page on your agency's website by 10% monthly, or reducing the number of phone calls fielded by customer service staff by 5% monthly.

Activity 1b: Understand Your Constituents' Needs

The process of setting goals should be an organized effort that considers both constituent and agency needs (Sarantis et al., 2010) – agency needs will be discussed in the next section. It is important to know your agency's constituency before attempting to meet its needs (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2011; Partnership for Public Service, 2013), so you should incorporate general constituent data into this process.

Recent research indicates that constituents’ income, education level, and even race influence their interaction with government online. For example, citizens with higher levels of income and education are more likely to follow an agency on social media sites or watch videos on government websites (Smith, 2010). Citizens who are non-white, young, or less educated are more likely to use a cell phone as their primary device for Internet access (Duggan & Smith, 2013). This data has important implications for identifying the needs of your agency’s unique constituency, especially with regard to how they access information.
from and interact with your agency. Research your constituency’s demographics and incorporate this information into your goal setting process.

Although demographic data is useful in planning e-governance projects, you should also consider investing in efforts to communicate directly with constituents to gather data regarding their communication needs. As discussed in the resources stage, a thorough citizen survey and/or the utilization of constituent focus groups are options for this task. Input obtained directly from citizens can be invaluable in planning not only e-governance projects, but other communication, marketing, and programming strategies as well. If your agency has performed any constituent surveys in the past, include those in your research as well, comparing their results to your current findings.

Whether or not you are able to communicate directly with constituents, be sure to consider the question, why would they want to utilize an e-governance tool? It is important to understand that these tools are different in how people use them versus a government website, print publication, call center, or even a public meeting or comment period for laws, regulations, etc. While all of these channels communicate information and most allow for feedback in some way, only e-governance allows for instant, publicly visible interaction and large-scale sharing. This is a unique social component to e-governance in that users are not only expressing their opinions to the agency but also to their friends, followers, and, in many cases, their entire community without even having to leave the comfort of their Facebook news feed or Twitter mobile app. Include this constituent need for real-time interaction with government agencies and fellow constituents in the process of setting goals for the project.

Finally, solicit input from staff who regularly interact with citizens, such as those in customer service positions. These staff are exposed to constituent needs on a daily basis,
and will likely have an acute understanding of trends and patterns that will be very useful in establishing project goals that are constituent-oriented (Beres, 2014).

**Activity 1c: Understand Your Agency’s Needs (and Get Management on Board)**

In addition to constituent needs, you will also need to consider your agency’s needs. An effective way to identify these needs is to include members of management from all potentially impacted agency departments in the goal setting process; they should be able to provide an in-depth understanding of agency needs and may also contribute to your understanding of the organizational resources discussed in the previous stage.

In addition, involving organization-wide management at this stage of the project will allow you to begin educating agency leaders about e-governance and eliciting buy-in for such initiatives, which can improve the potential for project success even in an organization whose culture is not primed for e-governance. Present to managers the initial motivation for considering e-governance as a means to reach agency goals (if there is one), along with your research into the resources of the organization and your findings from the constituent needs assessment.

The Partnership for Public Service (2013) recommends three additional approaches to gain the support of agency management:

- Providing one-on-one training and demonstrations to leaders who are unfamiliar or uncomfortable with e-governance;
- Giving leaders some ownership of the process by setting up their own social media accounts; and
- Presenting a combination of statistical data and anecdotes to explain the successes that other agencies have had in their e-governance initiatives.

Seeking managerial input and support during the goal-setting process not only aids in the identification of agency needs but also encourages leaders to take a personal interest
in the e-governance project and contribute to its success. In short, it makes your job a whole lot easier.

**Activity 2: Planning**

With the project goals established, you can begin planning the details of your e-governance project. There is a lot of work in this stage, including: selecting the appropriate e-governance tool; researching the tool and planning for the work it requires; preparing the agency website for launch of the tool; ensuring constituents’ equal access to the tool and/or the information it provides; developing and reviewing policy; and establishing processes for the management of constituent feedback the tool will elicit.

**Activity 2a: Selecting an E-governance Tool**

The first step in the planning process is to determine what tool is best suited for your agency’s resources and project goals. Social networking websites, such as Facebook and Twitter, are the most frequently utilized e-governance tools (Human Capital Institute, 2010), and they are effective at delivering information and providing opportunities for interaction and engagement. Content communities, such as YouTube and Flickr, are also utilized to disseminate information and enhance engagement in different ways. The financial costs of these tools are generally low, and the human resources necessary to maintain them are generally moderate, depending on how an agency utilizes them.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention’s “Health Communicator’s Social Media Toolkit” (2011) provides an analysis of the resource consumption of the most frequently used social media tools.

Your tool selection should be based on the established project goals, keeping in mind the constituents’ needs and agency resources considered during the development of those goals.
Activity 2b: Researching Selected Tool and Planning Work

Once you have selected a tool, continue researching it and determine what work will be involved in its launch and maintenance. The bulk of the work will be in generating content for the tool, so start planning the scope of this content, how it will be developed, and the frequency of its posting (Partnership for Public Service, 2013). For example, if you are planning to launch a Facebook page to achieve a project goal, you should determine what kind of content will contribute to the goal (i.e., narratives, photos, videos), how this content will be obtained or developed, and how frequently it will be shared. (See the activities section of this report for more details about the work you can expect.)

Also at this stage, establish the responsibilities of any staff involved in the project and provide the appropriate training. Although initial training will likely require a focus on tool-specific management techniques (such as how to post images to Facebook or how to utilize link shorteners for Twitter), both initial and ongoing training should also focus on more general social media communication skills, such as engaging specific audiences and listening to constituent feedback (Partnership for Public Service, 2013).

Activity 2c: Preparing the Agency Website

Your agency’s website is the foundation for its e-government activities, and your e-governance tool will be reliant upon and require integration with it. Ensure that the website is optimized for the sharing of its content that social media will enable. A very important part of this is the site’s metadata, which is information in the html code of each page that describes that page for search engines and social media sites. Each page that

See the United States General Services Administration Office of Citizen Services and Innovative Technologies’ “Matrix of Web 2.0 Technology Tools and Government” (2008) for a list of primarily third-party tools and examples of their application in federal agencies.
could potentially be shared on social media should have useful metadata, including a page title, description of its content, and associated image.

Website preparations should also include planning for the promotion of the e-governance initiative, which will require development work to integrate widgets and/or social toolbars either on specific webpages or site-wide.

**Activity 2d: Ensuring Equal Access**

Website preparations will also require ensuring that your site offers comparable information and opportunities for feedback as your e-governance tools in order to provide access for constituents who do not use these tools (Executive Office of the President Office of Management and Budget, 2010). These preparations will also assist you in ensuring compliance with federal laws mandating that the programs and services of federal government agencies – and all agencies receiving federal funding – be accessible for individuals with disabilities; these laws include the Americans with Disabilities Act and Sections 504 and 508 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (Bertot et al., 2012).

Depending on your agency level and its reliance on federal funding, social media and website content may also need to comply with any state or agency-specific requirements in addition to these federal mandates. Providing comparable content on the agency website as the agency’s social media will ensure accessibility for individuals with disabilities that may prevent them from using third-party tools (Federal Web Managers Council, 2008c).
Additional consideration for individuals with disabilities must also be made when developing multimedia content. For example, videos that are posted on YouTube must have captions for audio content and audio descriptions for visual content.

**Activity 2e: Developing and Reviewing Policy**

Prior to the launch of your e-governance project, develop a social media policy that addresses how designated staff will manage the agency’s social media site, how other staff are expected to interact with the site, and how the agency’s use of the site is in compliance with other agency policies (i.e., website privacy policy and terms of use, accessibility standards, ethics policy). The social media policy should also include a section clarifying what the agency expects for public interaction with the site, like what kind of comments are unacceptable and why, and what users can expect from interactions with the site, like a timeframe for the agency to address customer service issues (Heirman, 2014). When you launch the tool later in this process, be sure to post this section of the policy on the social media sites for the public to view.

If a link, widget, or toolbar for a social media site will be included on your agency’s website, revise the website’s privacy policy to acknowledge its connection to the site and refer users to that site’s privacy policy for more information. Also be sure to establish guidelines for sharing third-party content, such as that of partner or sponsor organizations.

Before finalizing these policies, consult with other staff in your agency, such as those who manage the website, manage partnerships and sponsorships, and perform policy...
reviews (including attorneys, if necessary) in order to make sure your policies are accurate, enforceable, and complementary to other agency policies.

**Activity 2f: Establishing Processes for Feedback Management**

Two additional considerations must be made for the constituent feedback that e-governance tools will elicit: channeling and archiving. One of the most important features of e-governance is citizen participation, and this participation must be utilized by channeling feedback regarding programs or services to appropriate staff to guide future decision-making. Establish a process for this purpose, such as designating contacts to receive feedback for each department and logging comments and follow-up in a database with regular reporting. In addition, a system must be developed for archiving constituent feedback to comply with public record and information laws, and your agency’s attorneys should be involved in this part of the project.

Refer to the National Archives and Records Administration (2013) for guidance and resources for archiving social media data.

**Activity 3: Launching and Maintaining**

Once the planning is complete, it is finally time to launch the e-governance tool! The launch should be promoted on your agency’s website and in its print publications, and once the users arrive, the maintenance begins. For the most part, maintenance involves developing content, adapting content to the selected tool, and engaging in interactions.

**Activity 3a: Developing Content**

When developing content, keep in mind the project goals, constituent needs, and unique social component of e-governance. Although the scope of the content was initially determined in the planning phase, continually work to ensure that this scope is supporting the needs of constituents, and not just the needs of the agency (the measurement activities
discussed in the products stage that follows will assist in this effort). Also be sure to adhere to the following general guidelines from the United States General Services Administration Office of Citizen Services and Innovative Technologies [GSA] (2011):

- Make the content useful, relevant, interesting, unbiased, understandable in any context (easy to share), and accessible from mobile devices.
- Ensure that the content conforms to Web Content Accessibility Guidelines 2.0 for readability on accessible websites, which recommend that content “not require reading ability more advanced than the lower secondary education level” (World Wide Web Consortium, 2014).
- Keep your voice (tone) easy to understand, confident, friendly, and purposeful.

Simpson (2013) provides a useful readability testing tool for websites and social media pages.

**Activity 3b: Adapting Content to Selected Tool**

The GSA’s guidelines for social media content are applicable across tools, but there are additional best practices for adapting content to each specific tool. For example, Facebook for Business reports that photos, videos, and succinct text in posts attract positive attention (2014). Resources developed by the Federal Web Managers Council (2014c) and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2014) provide additional guidance and trainings for individual tools; i.e., posts on Twitter should be 120 characters or less to allow space for retweets, YouTube videos should be less than three minutes to retain users’ attention, and images on Flickr should be appropriately tagged to facilitate search. These are only a few examples of the multitude of practices to optimize content for specific social media tools, and the resources mentioned above should be consulted for additional guidance.
Keep in mind that the project goals, agency mission, and general best practices for content and voice covered in the previous section should be at the core of all content development, regardless of the specific tool.

**Activity 3c: Engaging in Interactions**

Engagement is commonly the most feared element of e-governance for agencies, but it is also the most important because it serves the social need of constituents. The information that you post is also available on your agency’s website, but e-governance users choose to access it through social media in part because they can interact with it. There are generally three types of user interactions that elicit engagement from the agency, each associated with one or more sentiments:

- Comments, which can indicate a positive or negative sentiment;
- Questions, which may indicate a positive, neutral, or negative sentiment but do indicate interest; and
- Mentions, which may also indicate a positive, neutral, or negative sentiment but do indicate interest.

The measurement of sentiment will be addressed in a later section, but treat each of these interactions as a conversation in order to embrace the social aspect of e-governance and demonstrate your agency’s desire to listen to and engage with constituents.

Positive comments should be reinforced with, at the very least, a simple expression of thanks. These comments can also be reinforced by providing additional information related to the discussion, when appropriate. Negative comments should also be approached with respect, honesty, and care. Although posts that are inappropriate or irrelevant should be addressed in accordance with the established social media policy, Check out DigitalGov University (2014) for webinars on best practices for specific social media tools, including newer tools like Pinterest and Instagram.
under no circumstances should a negative comment that does not violate the policy be deleted or ignored. Negative comments provide an opportunity to clarify information and respond publicly to concerns.

Even if a concern is not something the agency can immediately address, you can assure the constituent that the concern has been passed along to the appropriate staff for consideration. In many cases, constituents are satisfied just with the knowledge that someone listened to their concern and will consider taking action to address it.

Questions that are posed through the agency’s social media should receive timely responses that provide accurate information and, if possible, a link to your agency’s website where more information can be found. Any comments that subsequently arise should be handled as discussed above. Mentions should also be addressed according to their sentiment; if a constituent takes the time to include your agency in a tweet or post a photo to your agency’s Facebook page, they should be acknowledged, even if it simply with a like or a favorite.

Review Oracle’s “Eight Steps to Great Customer Experiences for Government Agencies” (2012) for more tips on providing customer service through any channel.

All feedback – comments or questions, positive or negative – must be collected and both channeled and archived utilizing the processes and systems developed during the planning stage. Doing so will also allow you to identify your most frequently asked questions and craft responses to these questions that you can keep handy to save time (Chronister, 2013).
Stage 3: Products

The third stage of an e-governance project is identifying the products of the project, which are the directly measurable outcomes that can be later analyzed to determine the ultimate results of the project. There are two broad categories for these products: usage and feedback.

Product 1: Usage

Measuring constituents’ usage of the social media tool selected for the project provides important data that will grow and evolve over time. The Federal Web Managers Council (2014b) identifies twelve key metrics that provide insight into the impact of the project; four of these metrics will be discussed in this section, six will be addressed in the feedback section below, and two will be covered in the results section that follows.

The means of access to these metrics varies depending on the tool. Sites like Facebook and YouTube have native analytics programs that provide metrics, but Twitter does not. An option for accessing metrics for Twitter is utilizing a third-party management tool, such as HootSuite, that provides an analytics platform. Your agency’s website analytics will also be involved in measuring tool usage, as these metrics will indicate how social media sites are directing traffic to the website.

Get details for measuring data in each specific social media tool from the Federal Web Managers Council’s “Social Media Metrics for Federal Agencies” (2014b).

The four metrics identified by the Federal Web Managers Council (2014b) that reflect usage of e-governance tools indicate the breadth of the tool’s community and depth of its content interaction. The breadth metrics include community size and community growth.
− **Community Size:** Reflects the number of people who follow or subscribe to the tool.

− **Community Growth:** Indicates how the community size increases over time.

Although measuring the size and growth of the tool’s community is useful for reporting purposes, the more meaningful metrics are those related to the depth of the interactions the community is having with the tool. These metrics, conversions and viewing, reflect the content’s relevancy and usefulness.

− **Conversions:** Measures the number of desired actions taken on a piece of content. The definition of “desired action” depends on the tool, type of content, and purpose of the content; however, the action that is typically measured by conversions is clicks on a link included in, for example, a Facebook or Google+ post or tweet.

− **Viewing (specific to YouTube):** Measures how many times a video is viewed and how long it is watched.

While these depth metrics are different, conversions and viewing are both indicators of how interesting, relevant, and useful the content is to constituents.

**Product 2: Feedback**

Measuring usage data is important to understanding how many people are interested in your e-governance tool, how that number is growing, and how frequently people are acting on the content. Those metrics provide some insight into how effective a piece of content is, but feedback metrics generate a deeper understanding of how constituents feel about the content. As previously mentioned, the social component of these tools is very important to users, and the feedback they provide through sharing and responding to content is an extremely important factor in evaluating its effectiveness.

The Federal Web Managers Council (2014b) recommends measuring four metrics related to feedback: engagement responsiveness, engagement volume, loyalty, and customer experience.
− **Engagement Responsiveness:** Indicates how active your agency is in interacting with constituent feedback, such as responding to questions or requests. This agency-side activity has an important influence on the constituent’s social experience with the e-governance tool, and can be measured as part of the process for collecting feedback by recording how many questions the agency answers and how quickly.

− **Engagement Volume:** Calculates how many likes, +1s, shares, mentions, favorites, retweets, comments, etc., that your content receives. This quantitative measurement can be obtained from many social media tools’ native metrics programs and provides insight into what content is eliciting the most engagement. Over time, collection of this data can indicate trends in the kind of content that is most interesting or important to constituents.

− **Loyalty:** Measures how many constituents repeatedly visit your agency’s website through e-governance tools. This metric, which can be obtained through your website’s analytics tool, not only indicates the usefulness of the content being posted but also how trusted the tool is among constituents as they are continuing to use it to access information.

− **Customer Experience:** Provides crucial insight into not only the effectiveness of your content but also into constituents’ opinions of the programs, policies, services, and overall operations of the agency.

The customer experience metric is the most difficult to measure, but it can be assessed through a combination of techniques. One way to obtain this data in-house is during the collection of feedback; comments can be categorized by the program, policy, or topic they address and then categorized as positive, negative, or neutral.

SocialMention.com is a free tool that can contribute to your insight about constituents’ opinions by gathering data from more than 80 social media properties and generating sentiment reports for any search term, such as the name of your agency or one of your programs.
Alternatively, many social media monitoring consultants offer sentiment analysis as a paid service. Finally, your agency can perform and/or share online citizen surveys through social media to provide a more in-depth understanding of constituent opinions of how the agency is performing.
Result 1: Meeting Goals

Although the specific goals established for your e-governance project have been the core of the project’s planning and execution, you must revisit them after measurement data has been collected to determine if the project has been successful in reaching them. Any benchmarks set during the goal setting process, such as increasing visitation to a specific program’s page on the agency’s website by 10% monthly, are particularly useful in determining project success.

It will likely take time for the project to gain enough constituent usage and interaction to have a substantial impact on the project goals, so perform this evaluation regularly in order to assess both initial and long-term influence of the project. Make adjustments to the project’s resources, planning, or activities in order to continually improve its effectiveness.

Result 2: Increasing Transparency, Participation, and Trust

Unfortunately, the broader e-governance goals of increasing transparency, participation, and constituent trust are not easily measured. However, you will be able to see some impacts of these goals if they are reached, such as a decrease in the number of requests for information your agency receives, an increase in the overall level of feedback your agency receives, and an increase in usage of your agency’s programs and services.

To quantify the success of these goals, your agency should communicate directly with constituents as was (ideally) done during project planning. Again, this can be done by...
performing a comprehensive citizen survey or by utilizing focus groups. Compare the results of this data collection to any previous data to identify changes that have occurred in constituents’ usage of and satisfaction with your agency’s information and services as a result of the e-governance initiative.

**Result 3: Incorporating Feedback into Policy**

Success in the other broader goal of e-governance, incorporating constituent feedback into policy, is entirely in the hands of your agency’s staff and management as a whole. If your agency’s organizational culture is constituent-focused, or has become more constituent-focused through its experience with e-governance, your agency’s leaders are more likely to value constituent feedback and take it into consideration when policies or programs are evaluated or developed.

However, as the project manager, you can heavily influence your agency management’s attitude toward e-governance and its role in their decision-making process. Just as you are responsible for educating management about the potential for e-governance during the goal-setting phase, you are again responsible for educating management about the success of your e-governance initiatives when reporting results. Regularly report both the usage and feedback measurements of the project to management in easy-to-digest formats that demonstrate growth, engagement, and effectiveness.

DigitalGov offers a customizable template that demonstrates how to make metrics reports interesting (Kaczmarek, 2014).

The constituent sentiment gathered through the e-governance tools should be a primary focus of these reports, and any leaders who initially doubted the value of e-governance will likely be surprised by how much information it provides, and by how much positive feedback it reports. Although all members of management should be presented with these reports, leaders of departments whose activities or policies have proven
especially interesting to constituents (positively or negatively) should be more frequently brought into discussions about how the feedback can be utilized to shape future decisions.

Although there may be some residual resistance to the changes in communication that e-governance projects have produced, leaders should be gently reminded that feedback from any source is an important indicator of constituent needs, which should be the focus of any policy or program, and any government agency as a whole.
Conclusion and Additional Resources

E-governance is an ever-growing, ever-evolving field that keeps practitioners on their toes. The technologies, the trends, and the rules of the game are changing every day. Fortunately, you now have a project management model that transcends platforms, and a set of best practices that can be applied to your e-governance initiatives now and in the foreseeable future.

As these innovations continue to shape the landscape of government, you will need to continue learning, training, and leading the way to the brave new world of participatory democracy. Keep growing your knowledge base with the key resources and materials referenced throughout this report, listed below.

Key Resources

DigitalGov.gov – Managed by the GSA’s Office of Citizen Services and Innovative Technologies, this website offers guidance through blog posts, web-based and in-person trainings, and links to additional resources.

HowTo.gov – Also managed by the GSA’s Office of Citizen Services and Innovative Technologies, this predecessor to DigitalGov.gov offers similar services as the new platform, as well as opportunities for practitioners to join listservs and communities of practice (some are limited to federal agency employees).

GovLoop.com – An independent “knowledge network” for government, this website provides reports, trainings, discussion boards, and more resources developed by public sector members and private sector industry partners.
References


Federal Web Managers Council. (2008a). Examples of agencies using online content and technology to achieve mission and goals. Retrieved from


