A STRATEGY PAPER FROM CENTER FOR DIGITAL GOVERNMENT

MANAGING GOVERNMENT COMMUNICATIONS

IN THE AGE OF OPEN GOVERNMENT

THE NEED FOR MANAGED COMMUNICATIONS

Picture yourself as the newly appointed commissioner of the recently consolidated public works agency for a large municipality. Your agency was formed as part of a cost-cutting plan aimed at helping reduce the government's budget shortfalls. You are responsible for a wide range of services, including water and sewage, sanitation, transportation conditions and public housing. You are expected to not only reduce the costs of operations, but also to improve the overall customer satisfaction ratings for the agency. You are also required to make the results of your operations more transparent, and to fulfill the requirements of the newly passed open government legislation.

In examining your challenge, you are impressed with the significant improvements that were made in communicating with your constituents, mainly through the 311 service center that you are now responsible to run. However, you have found a number of serious issues:

- Separate legacy systems for different functions result in duplicative business functions and redundant technical support.
- Constituents are no longer satisfied with calling into 311 to report problems and check on the status of their requests and now desire communication through multiple communication vehicles including e-mail, text messaging, social networking websites and mobile apps.
- Messages sent out are not always consistent. For example, informational e-mail messages differ from data that is communicated via the phone regarding complex services such as hazardous waste disposal, status of pothole repairs, or what to do if the heater does not work during the winter. The expansion of communication vehicles — and the separate conventional siloed approach to providing the services — has resulted in communication overload and errors.

MANY AGENCIES ARE SUCCESSFULLY TAKING THE FIRST STEPS TO IMPLEMENTING CUSTOMER COMMUNICATION MANAGEMENT APPROACHES TO IMPROVE SERVICE, SUPPORT OPEN GOVERNMENT INITIATIVES, AND REDUCE COSTS — ALL AT THE SAME TIME.

Is this a hypothetical challenge or the reality agencies currently face during a budgetary conundrum? This paper will show that many agencies are facing these challenges across the country and are successfully taking the first steps to implementing customer communication management approaches to improve service, support open government initiatives and reduce costs — all at the same time.

DEALING WITH THE REALITY

The above scenario, while hypothetical, resembles the reality faced by most government executives across the country. The desire for transparent operations has captured the public's attention as government's role in the life of communities and the country has expanded coincident with massive investments of taxpayer funds in helping to stabilize economic conditions. Constituents are continually demanding more from their governments, and taxpayers want to know more about how their money is being spent. At the same time, government unfortunately not only has less revenue to fund the investments in technology that would help solve these problems, it is often operating with a reduced workforce.

Multi-million dollar modernization initiatives are not an option; if government leaders are to improve services under current fiscal conditions, they must begin to leverage

previous investments in technology. However, the problems presented above are not just technical issues; there are organizational considerations as well. In order to successfully fulfill the needs and expectations of an ultra-connected public, government leaders need to:

- manage communications in a consistent manner, using the communications vehicle that the constituent prefers;
- present government to constituents as a single entity — masking organizational distinctions;
- enhance constituent self service; and
- build upon and connect the legacy investments in technology.

MANAGING COMMUNICATIONS IN THE WAY THE CONSTITUENT PREFERS

Today's open government initiatives require a much more precise tracking and reporting of actions than was the norm even a few short years ago. Laws have been passed in most jurisdictions that require full disclosure of all governmental activities. Public websites abound with information — graphical in many cases — showing open work orders, average wait times, and all other forms of information that provide real-time performance monitoring.

In addition, individuals now demand real-time feedback on their service requests, wanting to know precisely when someone will show up to fix their problem. They also demand information detailing easier ways of processing transactions such as license renewals. The days when the public will stand in line for hours waiting to be called for a license exam are numbered. Innovative DMVs are already deploying technology that allows customers to input their mobile phone number and be notified about wait times and even hold their place in line.

It is critical to get the right message, to the right person, at the right time, in the way they want to receive it. This requires a comprehensive methodology to manage communications across the enterprise and necessitates expansion beyond the traditional constituent relationship management (CRM) approach used today in most sophisticated 311 operations. To put it simply, governments must integrate presentation and constituent response across all channels: paper, Web, e-mail, instant messaging, social networks and data feeds to the full range of end user devices: phone, PC, laptop, mobile.

The Arkansas Recovery Portal combines the need for greater transparency with efficient government-to-citizen communication. The portal — along with mobile applications — provides citizens with updates on how federal stimulus money is spent and how state and local governments are managing stimulus funds. The portal is updated as new funds are allocated. Citizens can find contact information and view dynamic graphs and maps, and track online requests. Thousands of citizens have received notifications by e-mail and the phone application has been downloaded several thousand times around the world.

Miami-Dade County, Fla., is working to perfect two-way communication with its residents. The county's "Service-Direct" capability allows residents to enter requests such as pothole repairs and notify officials of issues such as impaired street signs, among others. ServiceDirect shows real-time status of the user's requests and expands upon 311 by allowing call centers to send customized e-mails to the constituent. With the implementation of ServiceDirect, the county has seen cost savings through the elimination of 15 in-person service centers.

PRESENTING GOVERNMENT AS A SINGLE ENTITY

Governments, by necessity, provide many different types of services across many different functional areas: health and human services, public safety, education, licensing, motor

vehicles and other regulatory oversight, permits and various other forms of licensing, taxation and revenue collection, etc. These services are traditionally provided by separate agencies as the nature of the service is often quite different. For instance, the functions of a law enforcement department are distinctly different from those of a health and human services agency. Yet, even these functions need coordination, as in the case of probation for child offenders and the child support or other health and human services that may already be offered at the released prisoner's new domicile.

AN AGENCY'S ABILITY TO COMMUNICATE IN AN INTEGRATED MANNER WITH ITS SISTER AGENCIES CAN ACTUALLY PROVIDE A NEW SOURCE OF REVENUE AS WELL AS IMPROVE CONSTITUENT SERVICE.

An agency's ability to communicate in an integrated manner with its sister agencies can actually provide a new source of revenue as well as improve constituent service. The city of Dallas has found that by coordinating its monthly water bill statements with fines imposed by other city agencies it can substantially improve its revenue collections across all agencies.

To the south, Harris County, Texas, has consolidated more than five central databases to form a consolidated criminal history. The search application pulls information from numerous sources to provide data on one consolidated screen, saving prosecutors, staff and citizens countless hours of work — a defendant's transgressions can be pulled up in less than 10 seconds, a process which formerly took more than an hour.

Other examples of integrated solutions exist in complex inspection services, routine maintenance services, and other everyday government functions. Whether it's eliminating the redundancy associated with multiple field visits, or improving the revenue collection process, communicating with constituents in a common, integrated manner is providing serious benefits across the board.

ENHANCING CONSTITUENT SELF SERVICE

Improving constituent service does not come without a cost. Nor does the reporting, oversight and transaction tracking required to provide greater transparency come for free. One way to pay for those improved functions is to enable substantially more constituent self service. Spurred by the Internet, there are a number of illustrious examples where enhancements in self service have resulted in substantial improvements in overall service, as well as significant reductions in transaction processing costs.

In 1998 the Internal Revenue Service was put under strict Congressional direction to improve its constituent services while at the same time taking significant budget cuts. One area of service improvement was electronic filing, with a mandate to achieve 70 percent electronic filing by 2007. At the time of the mandate, electronic filings were less than 20 percent of the total filings, as the tax preparers were charging additional fees for electronic filing, thus discouraging its uptake. By encouraging the tax preparers to increase the number of electronic filings, the IRS not only improved its constituent service (faster refunds, less paperwork), but also substantially reduced its own workload and reduced errors associated with entering tax return data from paper documents into its own computers. This enabled the IRS to allow many of its people to do less tedious jobs, and to do a better job of advising the tax-paying public, as well as improving its overall collections.

Along those same lines, the New York State Department of Taxation and Finance has taken self service a few steps further

by modernizing their core systems using a service-oriented architecture (see sidebar "A Different Kind of Tax Collection"). All documents that the department receives from taxpayers or sends to taxpayers are now maintained in an XML form-overlay structure that makes them look a lot more like paper. As a result, when taxpayers check for their documents on the Web, or call center operators view documents while they are speaking to taxpayers, everyone is looking at exactly the same document.

The process of issuing driver licenses and motor vehicle registrations has also been made better by applying new technology. Most states provide simplified online processes over the Internet for individuals and businesses to renew their driver licenses, motor vehicle registrations and many other forms of permits and professional licenses. Not only does this save the constituent time, as they no longer have to visit the governmental entity, stand in line, take time off from their job, and become frustrated; but it streamlines the entire process, again reducing the amount of transaction processing that must be performed by governmental clerical operators. This allows the governmental entity to really focus on improving its internal processes within and across agency lines in order to drive costs out of doing the work of government.

States, cities and even counties across the United States are realizing the value of providing robust online self-service options for constituents. The cost savings coupled with the resulting increase in citizen satisfaction changes the relationship between residents and their government while vastly

A DIFFERENT KIND OF TAX COLLECTION

The New York State Department of Taxation and Finance launched a modernization program four years ago aimed at replacing its core legacy systems that were 30 years old and built upon a proprietary database management system. Deciding that they needed to facilitate self service if they were to reign in their costs, and also deciding that they needed to drastically reduce their printing and mailing costs, they architected the new systems following a service-oriented architecture approach that enabled them to manage all their paper electronically in XML formats. By integrating their print, Web and IVR services into a single XML structure they have dramatically improved customer service while at the same time reducing printing and mailing costs significantly.

Coupling Web-based services with growth in electronic filing has also had great benefits. The growth of e-filing has allowed the agency to absorb some of the budget cuts that have been necessary due to the fiscal environment. Refunds have been expedited in the personal income tax program and associated reductions in mailing, printing, paper processing and bank costs have made up for some of the spending the agency has had to cut.

The agency isn't stopping there. Having realized the benefits of managing taxpayer and tax preparer communications in a more electronic enterprise-wide manner, the next steps are using e-commerce techniques as well as e-mail to better facilitate communications. The agency is now working electronically with thousands of tax preparers by creating a single state-wide sign-on process that allows them to be properly identified and thus have access to the taxpayer records for which they are entitled to view. This is a major improvement in privacy policy, as the agency needs to assure with certainty the protection of taxpayer records. In addition, the agency is able to better service the tax preparers through e-commerce by pointing them to hundreds of different service offerings, such as programs designed to better track stock and bond transactions. The agency has clearly demonstrated that you can improve service and reduce cost at the same time.

improving the underlying cost structure. Fairfax County, Va., has conducted 600,000 payment transactions online, generating over $123 million in online revenue in 2008.

BUILD UPON AND CONNECT LEGACY INVESTMENTS IN TECHNOLOGY

Most governmental managers will recognize the challenges discussed here, and will have their own examples of how smart investments can both improve constituent services, while at the same time reducing their transaction processing costs. However, the reality of drastic reductions in technology budgets make it virtually impossible to buy an entire brand-new enterprise integrated system and simply replace legacy processes. Even if public agencies could afford such a wholesale change, few are willing or able to take on the risk of a major technology project.

That said, doing nothing isn't an option either. Without addressing the issue of a citizen communication strategy on an enterprise level, attempts to address the challenges discussed above are often met with less than optimal success. Leveraging prior investments, thus improving the return on investment on customer communication management solutions, is

TAKING "DOING MORE WITH LESS" TO NEW LEVELS

The California Employment Development Department (EDD), responsible for ensuring citizens receive unemployment benefits, faced a 400 percent expansion in customer interactions due to a doubling in the unemployment rate and an unprecedented spike in long-term unemployment, to which the federal government has responded by extending the unemployment period four times for a total eligibility period of 96 weeks. The agency primarily used telephone interactions to communicate with clients and employees would enter customers' data into a 20-year old system. However, due to the enormous volume increase the phone lines soon became overloaded, leaving the agency with a communications challenge.

Pam Harris, the agency's chief deputy director says, "the only workable strategy was to immediately give customers new ways to file with the agency by making our website more customer-centric." Harris didn't stop there; she also launched a number of major public relations activities to get customers interested in using the Web to communicate with the agency. One of the most innovative techniques the agency employed was to utilize YouTube to educate customers on how to file a claim, as well as contacting potential customers via employment-oriented websites. They also established a Twitter account and used it to communicate new information on a regular basis. The EDD is proud to claim that its number of followers on Twitter is greater than the state's main Twitter account.

While this had a significant impact on increasing the percentage of self-service digital transactions from less than 50 percent to now more than 80 percent, it also had a number of other strong benefits for the agency. According to Harris, "by expanding the number of channels that we used to communicate with our customers, we now had to address the issue of 'How do we keep all those messages consistent?'" In order to accomplish that goal, they established a new unit within the Public Affairs organization that was jointly staffed between employees from both the Public Affairs and Information Technology organizations. This created a much better working relationship between these two organizations, and helped the agency better manage communications.

clearly the key to success. It will extend the value of existing investments in mission-critical improvements to legacy systems across platforms at incremental cost without the need for wholesale system replacements. Organizations that have taken this approach to customer communication management have found success on many levels.

The California Employment Development Department (see sidebar "Taking 'Doing More With Less' To New Levels") has found that the use of a customer communication management approach to managing unemployment communications is best handled on an integrated enterprise basis. The agency has significantly improved its communications and services to its constituents at a time of great need and reduced budgets, by managing communications from a central platform.

Finally, integrating business intelligence capabilities and providing an integrated platform for developing and managing multiple applications in an age when open government increasingly means data mash-ups and mosaic views of formerly discrete information are a must. Governments can no longer afford to handle every constituent inquiry as a one-off. Providing data in a manner where the constituents themselves can mine and create their own information is becoming a requirement of a more open government. Led by efforts in Washington, D.C., and the federal government, states and municipalities across the nation are finding that the easiest way to meet open government demands is to simply make the raw data available in an integrated fashion.

CONCLUSION

Effective communication and interaction between government and its constituents requires more than a website and a call center. Governments must reach out to citizens through the channels they prefer, be it e-mail, text message, social networking website updates or a more traditional phone call. Information must be integrated and consistent — it is no longer acceptable for individuals to receive differing data depending on what medium they choose to access information.

At the same time, financially struggling government agencies must begin to realize the efficiencies and cost reductions that robust citizen self-service options can provide. They must limit duplicative services and processes and save themselves — and the public — much time and frustration by working together to present government as more of a single entity. Informational siloes created by departmental distinctions and organizational boundaries create lags in the public's ability to receive information and conduct its government business, while in turn costing government money that it does not have to waste.

Finally, at a time when multi-million dollar modernizations are not an option, governments must build upon legacy investments in technology, leveraging previous investments to improve their return on investment of customer communication management solutions.

More efficiently and effectively managing communications with constituents better serves everyone involved. Public agencies are able to reduce costs by eliminating redundancies and providing more self-service options. Increased access to information provides citizens with a more open and transparent government and helps them to be more confident that their tax dollars are put to good use. This combination of organized and simplified two-way communication is a platform that can benefit government and the citizens it serves for years to come.

From HP, the world's largest technology company, HP Exstream is a fully integrated software platform for creating, managing and delivering all constituent communications across the agency. Agencies reduce costs up to 80%, get critical communications out as much as 85% faster, meet compliance regulations, and significantly improve constituent response.

For more information about HP Exstream customer communication management solution, please contact Hewlett-Packard at (866)318-5925 or exstream.info@hp.com, or visit www.hp.com/go/realtime _ publicservice.

CENTER FOR DIGITAL GOVERNMENT

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