

Testimony presented to
The Assembly Committee on Government Operations
The Assembly Committee on Oversight, Analysis, and Investigation
The Legislative Commission on Government Administration

by
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Chairman Englebright, Chairman Hevesi, Chairman Latimer, and Members of the Assembly:

Thank you for the opportunity to present testimony to your Committees and Commission on behalf of the Center for Technology in Government (CTG) at the University at Albany, State University of New York. The topic you have identified for this hearing – examining how New York State’s agencies and municipalities are currently using advances in information technology and how such advances can be used to better serve the public and create jobs – is closely related to the mission of the Center, which is to foster public sector innovation, enhance capability, generate public value, and support good governance.

I come to my role as the Director of the Center for Technology in Government and as a member of the faculties of Rockefeller College of Public Affairs and Policy and the College of Computing and Information after 14 years as a computer center director at two capital district institutions of higher education and after 15 years in various roles at the Center itself. It was during my time in these positions that I became acutely aware of the challenges organizations face when they seek to innovate through the use of new and emerging technologies.

Understanding and working with governments to resolve these challenges, building the necessary skills both in the classroom and in the active workforce and creating new theoretical insights and practical guidance on these problems has become the focus of my professional work. In pursuing this agenda with my colleagues at CTG and elsewhere I am now identified as the 2nd most prolific scholar globally in the area of digital government research. I am also one of the three designers of Rockefeller College’s nationally ranked program in Government Information Strategy and Management. U.S. News and World Report has ranked our program here at the University at Albany as # 3 in the nation; 1st among public universities. In 2009 I received the University at Albany’s Excellence in Teaching Award and continue to work with students to help them build the necessary analytical skills to make smart choices about the technology investments they will make in their roles as future government leaders.

In my role as the President-Elect of the Digital Government Society of North America and the past and current Chair of the International Conference on Electronic Governance Theory and Practice, a United Nations University organized conference, as well as a member of the Board of the NYS Forum, I have had the unique opportunity to both be part of and lead conversations about how advances in information technology can be used to better serve the public; locally here in NY as well as nationally and internationally.

CTG has been at the center of conversations about government innovation since it was created in 1993 by then Governor Mario Cuomo. Since then, CTG has become globally recognized as a leader in working with governments to help them leverage the power of information technology in support of public service priorities. Within the state we have worked with many government agencies and non-profit organizations including the Department of State, Office of State Comptroller, Department of Corrections, the Office of Children and Family Services, NYS Office of Cyber Security, New York City Government, the Town of Bethlehem, and NYS Local Government IT Directors Association. Our work in New York State has allowed us to provide policy guidance and practical resources for state agencies and local governments in many areas including governance, performance measurement, process integration, workforce management, open government and open data, and information sharing and interoperability. In 1995 we received an Innovation in American Government Award from the Ford Foundation.

Beyond the state, our work has involved partnerships with the White House Office of Science and Technology Policy, the U.S. Department of Justice, the Social Security Administration, the National Science Foundation, the Library of Congress, the United Nations, the OECD, the European Commission, the World Bank, the China National School of Administration, the Turkish Ministry of Finance, the countries of Portugal, Oman, Moldova, Trinidad, and the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia.

One very important conclusion we have come to over the last twenty years of our funded research and practical problem solving is that in order for government to take full advantage of advanced information technologies to better serve the public and create jobs, they must have a complementary set of non-technology capabilities.

To reiterate: Most truly transformational information technology applications require changes in the institutional and organizational fabric of government. Change is necessary in three areas in particular:

1. New institutional capability for collaboration must be created.
2. A culture of information stewardship must be cultivated.
3. New organizational capability to answer the question “How does it matter?” must be created.

I’ll use the rest of my remarks to outline the foundational capabilities necessary for the required changes to occur and conclude with a set of related recommendations.

Foundational Capability # 1: Governance

No matter the change agenda on hand — whether it involves consolidation of governments, increased efficiencies through enterprise systems or using technological innovation to stimulate job growth — coordinated action across agencies, jurisdictions and sectors is required. To be successful, state government leaders need to understand that collaboration must be institutionalized as an organizational norm and management principle. The typical policy environment limits agencies from sharing authority, exchanging resources, and jointly managing

enterprise-wide initiatives. To change this, leaders must understand how policies can support or inhibit collaborative action.

Governance structures are particularly important for the use of information technology to promote economic growth and job creation. The most successful governance structures involve bringing together stakeholders to design frameworks that not only support government policy and programmatic priorities, but also align with stakeholders' goals and values. No one agency or even a group of agencies will be able to do this alone. These efforts must be cooperative and coordinated within State government and across levels of government.

Foundational Capability # 2: Information Policy

Elected officials and career executives increasingly recognize that many of their most important policy initiatives require government information to be managed, shared and used in new ways. Improving public health responses, educational assessments, human services integration and encouraging economic growth rely on changes in the information practices of governments.

Government IT leaders must work more closely with the state's records managers and archivists to improve how the rapidly expanding amount of government information in digital form is managed and preserved. Government leaders can support the development of these capabilities by creating a new government culture of "information stewardship." This culture will instill the shared understanding that government information must be acquired, used and managed as a resource or asset that has organizational, jurisdictional or societal value, and therefore must be treated as such. This cultural change will help government leaders understand the political, economic and social benefits of treating citizen and government information as a public asset.

New York State government has made some progress in creating a culture of information stewardship. In 2008, a report entitled *A Strategy for Openness: Enhancing E-Records Access in New York State* was developed in an unprecedented show of cross-boundary collaboration by the New York State CIO, New York State Archivist, agency CIOs, researchers, and the public, providing a set of recommendations for building a culture of information stewardship. These recommendations include the creation of a statewide Electronic Records Committee charged with providing the type of continuous analysis and collaborative work needed to define what information stewardship means for New York State.

Foundational Capability # 3: Public Value Assessment.

Public value, in the most general sense, focuses attention on the collective and societal interests that are served by particular institutional arrangements and actions of government. A public value framework can help to determine the value of government activities and do so from multiple stakeholder perspectives, not just a generalized, and thus ambiguous, citizen viewpoint. Much of the discussion around open government initiatives has been geared towards the broad all-inclusive category of citizens. By treating and analyzing such a diverse population as one undifferentiated group, any analysis falls woefully short of understanding the value of specific government actions. To highlight the need for a public value perspective I'll use the example of President Obama's open government directive.

The Obama Administration's [Open Government Directive](#) raised to prominence the principles of transparency, participation, and collaboration as “the cornerstone of an open government.” What lies at the heart of the open government vision is broader access to government data and creating new opportunity for citizens to contribute expertise and perspectives to government decision making. What is not yet clear is what types of value can be delivered and to whom through transparency, participation, and collaboration focused initiatives. While these three open government principles resonate in familiar and positive ways, it is not obvious how government agencies can best create new systems and services organized around them and ultimately deliver desired and measurable benefits to government and non-government stakeholders.

[Data.gov](#) is an example of a new system that was created with the principles of transparency and citizen engagement in mind. Hundreds of thousands of data streams were uploaded with the goal of enabling new opportunities for public use of this information. Inherently, most agree the act of creating data.gov produces value. But even if one assumes that the data is both usable and of high quality, which cannot be taken for granted, does the act of making greater amounts of government data available to the public by itself equate to greater transparency? How can the benefit of such an investment be understood and measured?

To begin to fill the gap in the ability of open government innovators to measure the impact of their efforts, CTG developed an approach to address critical questions of public value. In our approach, transparency, participation, and collaboration are best viewed as instrumental to the accomplishment of democracy in that they enable citizens to perform their various roles as citizens. That is, transparency is not an end citizens pursue for its own sake. Citizens may desire their government to be transparent, but that is largely because something else is at stake: information and actions must be transparent so that citizens can scrutinize and assess the concrete outcomes of government action.

Metrics that merely quantify how many datasets are available or how frequently opportunities to participate or collaborate are available, while useful for some purposes cannot be taken as unequivocal indicators that open government efforts have created public value. Similarly, participation for the mere sake of participating is an empty and alienating exercise; instead, citizens participate in order to produce government action that responds to and reflects their input in meaningful ways.

Drawing on research funded by the National Science Foundation and with the support of the U.S. Deputy Chief Technology Officer, first, Beth Noveck and second, Chris Vein, CTG developed a planning tool to support federal government agencies as they worked to answer the question “does it matter”? The resulting analytical tool, the PVAT, makes it possible to systematically identify the links between investments in technology, in particular in the area of open government, and the creation of public value. In the words of Kristen Baldwin, the U.S. Department of Transportation's Senior Accountable Official for Open Government,

“The PVAT forced us to think about the commitments we were making in the context of the value – we continually asked the question – ‘What is the public value of each our efforts and who is impacted?’ Having gone through this process, our plan is much more

focused on why these activities matter to our stakeholders and will position us better to succeed when we implement them.”

New York State and local governments must adopt a public value perspective and use that perspective to frame technology investment decision making. Adopting this frame of reference and using it to help establish a clear line of sight between investment and value creation will make it possible for governments to make choices that serve the best interests of citizens and other stakeholders.

In closing, I would like to return to the role of technology itself - achieving the goal of making New York a leader in IT-enabled government transformation will require the use of many emerging technologies such as cloud computing, social media, and mobile devices. These technologies present new opportunities for innovation in how government provides services, protects the public good, and especially how it interacts with citizens. But the technologies alone aren't enough to ensure that New York becomes a leader in creating jobs and serving the public more efficiently and responsively. Institutional and organizational changes, such as the foundational capabilities outlined above, are necessary. The State legislature working with the Governor and information technology and program leaders can create governance structures that support coordinated action across boundaries, bring new clarity to governments as a steward of information, and bring new attention to questions of public value. In doing so, together they can create the capabilities necessary to leverage technology and institutional and organizational innovation to bring New York into national prominence as a model of government transformation.

Thank you again for the opportunity to present this testimony.