

# did you know?

## CTG History Series — Part One

### CTG Celebrating Ten Years of Partnership, Research, and Innovation

**I**n 1993, a group of committed New Yorkers saw their idea of a government technology research center become a reality. What started as a volunteer project designed to help state government agencies use technology to improve operations and services became a full-fledged research center devoted solely to the public sector.

#### Growing out of grassroots

In the mid 1980's, a group of state information technology (IT) managers realized they were playing an increasingly important role in the missions of their agencies. They understood that advances in IT would only expand these responsibilities, so they wanted to capture and share what they were learning.

This group, the Interdepartmental Committee on Electronic Data Processing (ICEDP), asked

the Rockefeller Institute of Government to organize a series of seminars that would bring together new knowledge about information systems and management. The goal was to share this learning with colleagues and pass it along to the next generation of information managers. Sharon Dawes, who was a Fellow at the Institute, worked with David Andersen, a professor at the University at Albany's Rockefeller College, to coordinate the seminar series with the Governor's Office of Employee Relations. They worked with leading technology companies who presented best practices in the use of IT.

The seminars were well received and many members of the group wanted to keep sharing issues and knowledge. Paul Fisk, at the Division of Budget, helped find a small amount of state funding to set up the New York State Forum for Information Resource Management (the Forum), which was comprised of state agency

representatives who were responsible for information management.

From its beginning in 1987, the Forum sought to develop a research capacity that would help government agencies experiment with technology innovations in a low-risk environment.

***“The Center was the first place of its kind where state and local agencies could go to experiment with technology to learn what worked, and what didn't.” – Sharon Dawes***

Forum members were encouraged by the creation of New York's Centers for Advanced

Technology (CATs), which are university-based research organizations designated and funded by the legislature to conduct basic research into cutting-edge technologies. The idea for a “public CAT” to conduct applied research linked



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John Gable from NCR, Ron Watkins from NewVision Systems, Kevin Tweedy from Image Innovations, and a number of other creative people who were excited about the project.

The project combined process reengineering, document imaging, and workflow technologies to demonstrate how the number of processing steps could be cut in half and the entire process reduced from 120 days to 30 days. It led to an immediate improvement in title operations—before any funding was spent on costly new technology.

“This was a career highlight for me because I got to work with so many brilliant people,” said DMV’s Van Heusen. “Everyone had such great energy. It was contagious. We were able to leap over any obstacle that came up.”

to government operations captured the imagination of early Forum leaders such as Chuck Blunt who was with SUNY Central, Tom Donovan with the Department of Environmental Conservation, and Ed DeFranco with the Office of Alcohol and Substance Abuse Services. They discussed their vision with many public officials during these years.

The Center’s founders believed that a university-based model would produce a wide array of benefits.

Many programs and higher education institutions were interested, but none could offer financial support.

So the Forum decided to try a project without any funding. “We wanted to do something tangible to get people excited about the idea,” Dawes said.

Together, the University at Albany and the Forum created a Government Technology Solutions Center. It operated from 1991 to 1993 with volunteers and donated resources including the support and participation of several state agencies and corporate partners, as well as the time and expertise of university faculty and students.

The first project was a huge success. It involved an imaging application being considered by the New York State Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV). The project brought together a group of people from the agency, corporate partners, and the University to investigate what it would take to image documents and redesign the workflow for the issuance of replacement vehicle titles.

The project team included University at Albany Computer Science Professor Peter Bloniarz, graduate students, DMV Project Manager Betty Van Heusen,

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When the project was completed, the project team hosted dozens of demonstrations to people at DMV, other state agencies, and legislative staff. “People were blown

away at what we were able to accomplish. We showed them specific examples. The [DMV] clerks walked away knowing that the way they worked was going to change.”





“This project was a success not because the technology worked, but because the project worked for the agency,” said Peter Bloniarz, who was the first CTG Research Director and is now the Interim Vice President for Research at the University at Albany. “It also showed other agencies what could be done with document imaging technologies and how improvements could be made by exploring the process.”

Van Heusen agreed. “For years afterward I continued to get calls from other agencies asking questions about imaging technologies.”

At the same time, a Forum Standing Committee, chaired by Jackie Del Rossi from the Office of Mental Health, was drafting a set of operating policies for continued work at the Solutions Center. (The Standing Committee exists to this day to advise CTG.) As agencies made recommendations for new state initiatives for the coming year, the idea of CTG was solidified. The 1993 State of the State address included a commitment to “set up a Center for Technology in Government to pursue new ways of applying technologies directly to the practical problems of information management and service delivery in the public sector.”

On July 1, 1993, the Center began operation in an unused television studio at the University at Albany. Dozens of corporate partners contributed hardware, technical support, and consulting services to help CTG turn the studio into a state-of-the-art

computing and communications laboratory. The lab was made possible by the help of many corporate partners including AT&T, Digital Equipment Corporation, Hewlett-Packard, Microsoft Corporation, and Sun Microsystems.

That first year was a busy one as the Center worked to establish itself, select its first round of projects, and show early results. “It seemed like we were moving every few months. We were scrambling to hire people, finding desks and workspaces, deciding what projects to work on, and then doing the work,” said David

Andersen, a Distinguished Service Professor of Public Administration and Faculty Fellow at the Center. Andersen spent a sabbatical year helping to launch CTG.

“CTG was a way for the University to take its smartest people – both faculty and students – to work with state agencies and corporate partners on projects that could make government better,” said Bloniarz.

***“Our early success was not serendipity, it was a belief that our work was good for government,” – David Andersen***

Center staff and Forum members evaluated nearly forty project proposals. The flagship projects that were

chosen by the Center’s Advisory Board included assisting the Adirondack Park Agency (APA), the Office of Mental Health (OMH), and the Office of Regulatory and Management Assistance (ORMA) to address mission-critical information management and service delivery problems.





These early projects delivered results. One prototype demonstrated how the APA's response time to certain public services could be reduced from weeks to hours. OMH's prototype showed how the expert judgment of leading psychiatrists could be incorporated into a decision support tool for emergency room personnel. ORMA's prototype showed how business permit information could be delivered 24-hours-a-day, seven days a week. All of these results generated important information about IT and organizational factors before agencies invested money in new systems.

CTG was recognized nationally for this early work. In 1994, the National Association of State Chief Information Officers (NASCIO) presented the State of New York with its top information policy and management award for creating the Center. The Adirondack Park Agency project was selected by Interchange '94, a federal-state-local consortium, as one of top ten national prototypes for its focus on customer service, quality management, and intergovernmental cooperation.

"Our early success was not serendipity, it was a belief that our work was good for government. That was how we could seek out and stand up to peer review. And that was why we were recognized by key people on the national level," Andersen said.

In 1995, the Center received the nationally renowned Innovations in American Government Award from the Ford Foundation. The Innovations award program honors exemplary initiatives at the federal, state, and local levels that provide creative solutions to important public problems.

As part of the award, the Ford Foundation provided the Center with a grant of \$100,000, which was used to expand dissemination of project results nationwide.

"The Center was the first place of its kind where state and local agencies could experiment with technology to learn what worked, and what didn't," said Dawes.

"Even today, New York is the only state to have created a place like CTG, whose main purpose is to help government make good decisions about increasingly important IT investments. By accumulating the knowledge generated by each project and taking advantage of the Internet to share it, we have created a growing knowledge base that benefits national and international partners as well as state and local governments."

### **In the next issue:**

Part Two of our CTG History Series presents intergovernmental and multi-agency partnership projects that resulted in Tying a Sensible Knot, Recommended Practices for the World Wide Web, and the development of the prototype GIS Clearinghouse.

*Did you know?* is a special section of CTG's Innovations newsletter. It is designed to provide readers with more depth on work conducted by the Center.



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