

## Identifying Costs

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People often underestimate the cost of developing a Web site. There are so many different kinds of expenses that it is easy to overlook some.

The county and municipal representatives who participated in the study identified the following costs: hardware and software, staff time for technical work and content creation and management, overtime pay, contracts with ISPs, and the often intangible costs of competing job priorities for staff. Most of these governments figured out how to develop their sites within existing budgets and using current staff. For them, their sites quickly became regular costs of doing government business.

### Human resource issues: overtime pay and job priorities

Since most staff who work on Web projects already have other full time jobs, you can run into overtime and job priority issues. These costs are often hard to track, but they were a primary cost for the county and local governments we interviewed. The more the Web site becomes part of day-to-day government operations, the more your government may want to consider creating a dedicated Web master position.

Participants said that in many cases they spent personal time developing and maintaining the Web site without additional compensation. As they took on new Web site duties, their other responsibilities did not decrease.

### To outsource or not to outsource

A vast majority of the governments with whom we worked chose to develop their sites in-house and outsource the hosting. The decision to outsource hosting for one county was driven entirely by costs. It was much cheaper to pay an ISP \$100 a month than spend \$30,000 to buy a server and invest in the technical staff expertise.

For one city, the decision to outsource was even easier. Under a 10-year agreement, a local college hosted the site for free. The main cost to the city was a slower connection when classes were in session.

By contrast, participants said outsourcing site design and development can be very expensive. One city paid a contractor as much as \$115 an hour for the changes it made while developing its Web site.

Because developing a Web site is such a creative and continuous process, the cost of those changes added up quickly.

The City of Oneonta partnered with Hartwick College, which agreed to host its site for 10 years.

### Partnerships

Partnering with surrounding governments may reduce costs. It allows you to share technical staff expertise, project outsourcing costs, and/or the technology infrastructure needed to host and maintain the site.

One municipality said it was starting to develop a partnership with its county government. Others were contemplating the idea for future Web site initiatives.

### Tips from colleagues

- "The people costs are the main ones. The rest doesn't account for as much."
- "Detailed, segregated costs are basically irrelevant when you're talking to governments of very small size. The work is just rolled into our regular jobs."