

Creating Open Government Ecosystems: A Research and Development Agenda

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In this paper, we propose to view the concept of open government from the perspective of an ecosystem, a metaphor often used by policy makers, scholars, and technology gurus to convey a sense of the interdependent social systems of actors, organizations, material infrastructures, and symbolic resources that can be created in technology-enabled, information-intensive social systems. We use the concept of an ecosystem to provide a framework for considering the outcomes of a workshop organized to generate a research and development agenda for open government. The agenda was produced in discussions among participants from the government (at the federal, state, and local levels), academic and civil sector communities at the Center for Technology in Government (CTG) at the University at Albany, SUNY in April 2011. The paper begins by discussing concepts central to understanding what is meant by an ecosystem and some principles that characterize its functioning. We then apply this metaphor more directly to government, proposing that policymakers engage in strategic ecosystems thinking, which means being guided by the goal of explicitly and purposefully constructing open government ecosystems. From there, we present the research agenda questions essential to the development of this new view of government's interaction with users and organizations. Our goal is to call attention to some of the fundamental ways in which government must change in order to evolve from outdated industrial bureaucratic forms to information age networked and interdependent systems.