

Section IV. Reflections on the Framework and the Value of Public Value

This framework grows from the rather simple principle: that the value of a government's investment in IT should be assessed from the point of view of the public it serves. That principle leads us to identify two distinct but equally important types of public value: delivering *benefits directly to citizens* and enhancing the *value of government itself as a public asset*. From this seemingly simple beginning grows the rather high level of complexity involved in working through this framework and its potential application. That complexity derives in part from the way these ideas radically expand the possible scope of inquiry needed to identify and document public value creation. That expanded scope brings with it a host of measurement problems that emerge when the many social and political outcomes come into play. The cost of this expanded and more complex assessment can be quite high.

So government executives and IT planners can rightly question whether assessing public value is worth the effort. Part of the answer may be that they will have no choice. As we noted earlier, elected officials have begun insisting on more comprehensive cost and return analyses for IT investment proposals. Conventional approaches to ROI analysis may simply be inadequate for these increased demands.

More importantly, however, the desire for a more comprehensive and robust justification for new IT investments reflects their greater complexity and ambition. The low-hanging fruit available from earlier IT investments, such as establishing Web presence and automating simple service transactions, has typically been harvested. More substantial improvements in government are now possible by exploiting the integrative and transformative potential of IT, but they require much larger investments. These projects require a way of assessing public value that matches their greater scope and complexity, a way that can build the needed public support and guide development. In this light, the cost of using a framework such as this should be easily justified. Moreover, the new knowledge about public value possible from such an assessment can help guide other forms of investment and contribute to long-term government improvement.