Center for Technology in Government

A Brief Survey of Government Internet Policies

Center for Technology in Government
University at Albany, SUNY
1535 Western Avenue
Albany, NY 12203
Phone: (518) 442-3892
Fax: (518) 442-3886
Email: info@ctg.albany.edu
http://www.ctg.albany.edu

Abstract

A Brief Survey of Internet Policies

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Over the past two years, government organizations have increasingly begun to use the Internet to disseminate and gather information and to offer services to the public. As these applications multiply, concerns surrounding appropriate use, management, and value have emerged. In so short a time, states, localities, and federal agencies have only begun to explore the possibilities and understand the complexities of the Internet. As a result, Internet use policies are only in their infancy. As part of an Internet Services Testbed project, the Center for Technology in Government collected and reviewed existing government policies between April and July 1996. This paper presents the topics that were considered most important and how they were treated in policy documents.

Introduction

Over the past two years, government organizations have increasingly begun to use the Internet (especially the World Wide Web) to disseminate and gather information and to offer services to the public. As these applications multiply, concerns surrounding appropriate use, management, and value have emerged. In so short a time, states, localities, and federal agencies have only begun to explore the possibilities and understand the complexities of the Internet. As a result, Internet use policies are only in their infancy. As part of an Internet Services Testbed project, the Center for Technology in Government collected and reviewed existing government policies during April - July 1996. We tried to learn what topics were currently considered most important and to see how these topics were treated in policy documents. Most policies examined came from states and are meant to govern the activities of individual agencies. Each policy was reviewed to answer two questions:

- What do state governments consider essential items to cover in an Internet policy?
- What kind of guidance do they give? (e.g., very specific rules, guiding principles)

We searched the WWW for state government policies and also solicited responses from government organizations through the NASCIO and GOVPUB listservs. NASCIO is the National Association of State Chief Information Officers, an organization representing the information management agencies and professionals in all 50 states. GOVPUB is an Internet discussion list created to encourage discussion among state and local government professionals who are responsible for creating and maintaining Internet services. In all, we reviewed 17 government polices (twelve states, two state agencies, two federal agencies, and Australia). The variety we found reflects the wide range of uses and approaches that can be seen in the way governments use the Internet today. The policies ranged from very detailed "cookbooks" with many definitions and procedural requirements to "guiding principles" that emphasize over arching policy goals. Some cover a full range of topics, others emphasize only one or two. After examining the various policies, four main focus areas emerged.

Sanctioned Uses of the Internet

This area focused on a rationale for why a government or an agency should consider connecting to the Internet. Some states paid very close attention to this topic and this was reflected in the specifics of their policies. Policy makers who envisioned both the pitfalls and the potential productivity enhancements of Internet-based services were better able to articulate why a given restriction, freedom or measure might be necessary. Most policies sought in some fashion to explain why the Internet was a "good thing." Education, research, and better communication were the most often cited reasons for connecting to and using the Internet. The more comprehensive policies took the time to explain both the benefits and costs associated

with Internet use. In short, the policy makers who thought through and then explained what the Internet could be used for seemed to have also developed more comprehensive and useful policies. These policies strike a balance between micro and macro management. They explain reasons for connecting to the Internet and examine connectivity in the light of both pluses and minuses.

Web site Design Criteria

Many states were concerned with design criteria or guidelines for WWW sites. This concern over the appearance of Web pages surfaced with greater focus and clarity in the more recent policies and encompasses such topics as "look and feel," consistency from agency to agency, and useful navigation aids. These policies ranged from many specific rules that must be applied to all sites to very general guidelines that left implementation up to individual agencies. The very specific policies tended to require certain design features and detailed programming methods for the creation of Web sites.

Security Policies

Security was a major concern in almost all of the policies and was covered in great detail in many of them. Most of the security issues centered around the protection of "sensitive" documents and explicit assignment of responsibility for security. Many specified technology requirements to ensure network and hardware security. Security policies varied in the degree to which a state delegated security responsibilities to agencies and the extent to which they defined the types of materials that should be considered in establishing policies. In almost every case, however, security responsibilities were ultimately placed on the specific agency desiring an Internet connection or presence.

Employee Rights/Responsibilities

Almost all of the policies establish behavioral guidelines for employees. Most policies were very explicit about what are acceptable and inappropriate uses of on-line services. Almost universally, the policies sought to prohibit the use of the Internet for illegal activities or personal gain and to protect against copyright infringements. Privacy concerns were also common. Some of the most recent policies address non-business activities like "surfing" and games.

Three Internet Policies

Of the various internet policies that we analyzed for this project, we would like to suggest three that warrant closer examination. These include Minnesota, Ohio, and New York. These policies are not necessarily better than any of the others but do seem to take a broader perspective on the Web and are far more inclusive with regards to the range of issues that providing Web services elicits. URL's are provided below.

The Minnesota site is actually the Information Policy Office of the state and provides a wide range of policies regarding almost anything dealing with information in an electronic world. This site is particularly appealing since it covers such a broad spectrum of issues. Not only are Internet policies and start-up check-lists provided but the entire Internet site seeks to integrate information and service delivery rather than just concentrating on the do's

and don'ts of Web services. The policies take the unique approach of identifying data, management standards, and people principles as all being important components in the design of information systems, especially on the Web.

The Ohio site comes through the Computer Services division. The division has established an Internet Advisory Committee. This committee along with the Office of Policy and Planning has issued 11 policies at the time of publication. These policies cover the realm of information and telecommunications services. The Ohio site gives an excellent example of the justification for the continuity of Web site design as well as policies that cover employee rights and responsibilities rather extensively. The Ohio policies represent a very well articulated and incremental approach to information policy concerns.

The New York State Internet Policy, issued in May 1996 by the Governor's Task Force on Information Resource Management, took into account some of the policies reviewed here. It takes a "guiding principles" approach which explains the value of the Internet for government purposes and outlines key statewide policy objectives. It explains why the state has adopted the Internet as a channel for communications and service delivery and outlines the responsibilities that agencies have for using it effectively. It also includes a model agency-level policy for individual departments to adapt to their particular needs. The policy noted that practical guidelines would be issued to help agencies implement these policies in their Web sites. These have now been issued as a separate document entitled **Developing and Delivering Government Services on the World Wide Web: Recommended Practices for New York State**. The Task Force has also published several other policies regarding other information resource concerns facing New York State.

Appendix

The following is a listing of the policies examined, a Web site location, (if available; note that url addresses may no longer be active) a contact person, (if available) and a brief description.

Alaska

Contact:

Mark Badger

Director

P.O. Box 110206

Juneau, AK 99811-0206

(907) 465-2220

(907) 465-3450 (fax)

Web Site:

http://www.state.ak.us/local/akpages/ADMIN/info/home.htm

Comments:

The site offers various policies relating to informational issues including topics such as electronic mail, GIS systems, electronic imaging, and personnel policies.

Arkansas

Contact:

Robert McQuade

Department of Computer Services

State Planning Division

PO Box 3155

Little Rock, AR 72203-3155

501/682-4302

501/682-4301 (fax)

Web Site:

http://www.state.ar.us/dcs/spd.htm

Comments:

Straight forward one page document laying out basic state policies regarding the use of "electronic communication systems."

Australia

Web Site:

http://www.vicnet.net.au/vicnet/it.html

http://www.adfa.oz.au/DOD/intuse.html

Comments:

Guidelines for Web site design. Also contains some interesting material regarding ethical conduct on the net and customer service focus.

California State Employment Development Department

Contact:

Kurt Hanselmann

(916) 654-7812

Comments:

A high level policy written to guide branch employees. Designed to be technology independent.

Federal Aviation Administration (FAA)

Web Site:

http://www.tc.faa.gov/NM/inetpoly.html

Comments:

Simple straight forward document. (less than one page)

Indiana

Web Site:

http://www.state.in.us/dpoc/dpoc.html

Comments:

The policy is very explicit about agency and department roles regarding Internet connection, use and security. The acceptable use guidelines are very well thought out and explained.

Maine

Contact:

Mary Cloutier

Web Site:

http://www.state.me.us/ispb/policy.htm

Comments:

This policy has an interesting focus on e-mail usage as well as general professionalism regarding use of the Internet. The Information Services Policy Board home page should also be examined.

Minnesota

Contact:

Information Policy Office

State of Minnesota

320 Centennial Building

St. Paul, MN 55155

612/296-5643

612/296-5800 (fax)

Web Site:

http://www.state.mn.us/ebranch/admin/ipo/hb/sorttype.html

Comments:

This policy is in draft form. Very comprehensive format. Start-up kit provided. The policy covers liability issues rather extensively. Also an excellent section regarding Internet usage and value-added concepts.

New York

Contact:

James G. Natoli, Chairperson

Governor's Task Force on Information Resource Management

Executive Chamber

State Capitol

Albany, NY

518/474-0865

518/473-3389 (fax)

Web Site:

http://www.oft.state.ny.us/

Comments:

The Task Force has authored and distributed several Internet related policies. These include: Technology Policy 96-11, NYS Network Services Agenda; Technology Policy 96-14, NYS Use of Electronic Mail; and Technology Policy 96-8, NYS Use of the Internet.

North Carolina

Contact:

North Carolina Office of the State Controller

IRM Staff

3700 Wake Forest Rd.

Raleigh, NC 27609-6860

919/715-3523

919/715-3530 (fax)

Web Site:

http://www.osc.state.nc.us/IRMC/documents/approvals/irmcinet.html

Comments:

A high level document discussing policy and guidelines on the use of the Internet. It provides reasons for using the Internet and then specific guidelines under each section regarding agency-level use.

Ohio

Contact:

Philip N. Grano, Deputy Director

Department of Administrative Services

Division of Computer Services

30 East Broad Street

Columbus, Ohio 43266-0409

614/466-6920

614/644-9152 (fax)

Web Site:

http://www.odn.ohio.gov/compserv/

Comments:

There are two policies of interest: OPP-008, *Limitations on the Use of Publicly Owned Computer Hardware and Software* and OPP-022, *Internet, Electronic Mail and Online Services Use and Abuse.* This policy contains a section regarding continuity of web site design and also provides a comprehensive section regarding employee rights and responsibilities regarding Internet use.

Oregon

Contact:

Department of Administrative Services

Information Resources Management Division

155 Cottage Street NE

Salem, OR 97310

503/378-4127

Web Site:

http://www.state.or.us/IRMD/policies/03-13net.htm

Comments:

Very complete but brief document. Contains complete statement regarding Internet use and agency responsibilities. An index of related policies is also available from the web site.

South Dakota

Web Site:

http://www.state.sd.us/bit/is/document/INTERNET.HTM

Comments:

South Dakota takes the rather unique approach to web site design by managing all state web sites through a central agency. This agency is the "Webmaster" for the state, oversees all aspects of design, and ensures consistency.

Texas Department of Health

Contact:

John Burlinson

Web Site:

http://www.tdh.state.tx.us/

Comments:

Includes agency goals regarding the WWW, and standards and guidelines for WWW use, along with procedures and forms.

Virginia

Contact:

Information Technology Clearinghouse

Department of Information Technology

110 S. 7th Street

Richmond, VA 23219

Web Site:

http://www.state.va.us/~itc/usepol.html

Comments:

This is a sample policy designed to help agencies think about their own policy needs regarding acceptable use practices.

Wisconsin

Contact:

Bill Braham, Information Technology Coordinator

Department of Administration

Division of Technology Management

Bureau of Information and Telecommunications Management

101 East Wilson Street, 8th Floor

PO Box 7844

Madison, WI 53707-7844

608/267-0625

608/267-0626 (fax)

Web Site:

http://www.doa.state.wi.us/

Search under *Division of Technology Management*, then *Bureau of Technology Policy and Planning*

Comments:

Full coverage of security issues. Includes discussion of ways to provide access to information on the Web site through other mediums. Public input and customer service stressed throughout. Also contains sections regarding: WWW, gophers, file transfer pr