Questions About E-Gov

What are the most important impacts of ICTs on the structure and processes of government organizations? Which impacts are already discernible?

- Ease of access to information
- Ability to provide services online
- Centralization of services
- Intra- and inter-governmental database connectivity
- Centralization and non-duplication of citizen information
- Technology will transcend gender, geography, income level, socioeconomic status, vested business interests, and political hierarchies
- ICT will also transform elections

Which are likely to emerge during the next decade?

- Online tracking and analysis of citizen need and creation of related policy
- Citizens more comfortable with, informed about, and demanding of government
- Closing of federal offices in DC and throughout the country
- More cyber attacks of greater magnitude
- Complete reorganization of government (e.g., what happens to Government Printing Office?)
- Complete redefinition of government titles, roles, and responsibilities
- Increased networking, more knowledge workers, changes in career paths, and single face of government

How are public managers and policymakers using ICTs to craft new organizational forms or to make important modifications to present forms?

- Anecdotal evidence might suggest new “virtual” organizations focusing on content building (not techie), working in a distributed intelligence mode, across boundaries.
- Bush Administration Management Agenda includes enhanced e-gov as one of five elements: key here is cross-boundary, intergovernmental—unify and simplify are the principles

What decision-making and problem-solving processes are emerging as the principal means of mutual adjustment?

- Online voting and polling—though Americans still don’t want this (Hart Teeter). Holding government accountable is extension of this. Providing a two way communications, not just govt talking to citizens
- Virtual conferences
- Online discussion forums—better expert tools and tutorials and digital guides
- Online seeking of public input

What is the impact of increasing use of information-based, networked forms of organization on the institutional structures (e.g., oversight, budgeting, and accountability systems) that regulate governance?

- Speculative somewhat but this will increase transparency first and accountability second. As a key tenet of Jane’s book, our democratic system of government is predicated on citizen consent to being governed. If public trust in government institutions erodes, then our form of representational democracy can’t work. This information-based, networked form of government provides more opportunities for citizen participation and therefore chances for enhanced public trust. Oversight and accountability is now possible and cost effective.
What perspectives, theories, conceptual frameworks, and methods seem particularly useful for the study of the developmental processes and organization of digital government?

There appear to be at least five imperatives, at least at the federal level, to ensure we develop true digital government (i.e., web services primarily): leadership (talk, talk, and talk some more about it), championship (encourage innovators and prevent marginalization of innovators), incentives (make digital government a key criteria of success in all managers job sheets), partnership (rely on best practices from both private and public sectors and get help in prototyping—RAD), and urgency (at least at the federal level, there is on average only 18-14 months window for political leaders—need short term, concrete deliverables.

The following perspectives, I think, will significantly limit the effective implementation and adoption of e-government:

Remember the bureaucrats’ perspective: they want to hoard information, not collaborate, and want his or her organization to “shine” at the expense of another (for example Small Business Administration “versus” U.S. Business Advisor or, more traditionally, Department of Commerce). In a traditional sense, it’s about ownership which leads to credit which leads to increased resources.

Remember the perspective of anyone with a position of influence: they want to hold onto their influence and will therefore resist any opportunity to lose it. Competition needs to be replaced by collaboration, but that will occur only if it’s rewarded.

On an international level, it is important to remember that ICT will give hope to the hopeless and a voice to the voiceless by creating, for example online voting where it is more difficult to spoil an election; offering optical identification where it will be more difficult to deny someone a chance to vote; providing online information to the masses once repressed due to gender, age, religion, geography, and socioeconomic hierarchy; providing online communication so kindred spirits around the world can coalesce and partner with and learn from each other; etc.

What forms and processes of collaboration between social, policy, and information scientists might further a research agenda for digital government? How might an organization like NSF Digital Government program provide direction, guidance, and incentives for the advancement of research?

Some areas of further research are listed below.

Customer or Citizen Service

Issues regarding how citizens will be provided online vs. onsite and centralized vs. local assistance must be addressed much more thoroughly since this will impact not only access to assistance but also the overall workforce structure and education of government employees. As virtual counseling and discussions become the norm, how will the citizen be guaranteed face-to-face or phone-to-phone discussion? With online inquiries fast taking precedence over phone and regular mail, how can the citizen be assured of a timely and accurate response? How will the web site, automated responders, static e-mail inquires, and dynamic instant messaging, facsimile, telephone, and in-person visit options be integrated into the overall customer service strategy? How will the organization change as a result of its online customer service strategy? How will customer satisfaction be ensured?

Tracking and Analysis of Citizen Inquiries and Needs

Online customer servicing will allow for a more systematized way of tracking citizen inquiries and need (rather than mostly undocumented telephone or e-mail inquiries). Responses to citizen queries can not only generate a
growing list of answers to frequently-asked questions but these responses can be analyzed to identify complaints, bottlenecks, and overall needs of the client that may result in organizational refocus or policy adjustments. I think if NSF worked with the government agencies to compile an annual listing of commonly asked questions, each agency could get to the core of exactly where the majority of citizens need assistance from government. If a government-wide common system were established to capture the online queries and related responses, over time, 99% of the citizen’s common questions can be archived, thus providing specific answers to specific citizen queries. After all, isn’t e-government simply providing information and services to citizens any time, any place?

Also, a government-wide system should be developed whereby an automatic follow-up with citizens is sent after x days or weeks of their inquiry. This way, we can easily and automatically identify which agencies are responding to the needs of its citizens—maybe this should be the core of USA Services. After all, doesn’t government exist mainly to provide exemplary services to the citizens who pay for them? Our goal should be delivery of customer service equal to or exceeding that one experiences from the private sector, e.g., amazon.com transaction might be a benchmark.

Understanding the Citizen’s Perception of Big Brotherism

In order for government agencies to logically and rationally develop web sites that respond to their needs for information and yet to protect the privacy of the client base, it is important to understand the rational and sometimes irrational concerns about privacy. Also, a research agenda should be outlined to determine what macro government-level information is needed from every individual, how the information will be stored for decades if not centuries, how the information will be used, how the information will be analyzed, and the concerns about cyber attacks, destruction of data, backups, etc. Also, researchers may want to inquire why there is what I perceive to be an over hyper-sensitivity about collecting, using, and analyzing personal information. Do they understand government laws about privacy or is the American populace including its elected leaders and bureaucratic caretakers imbued with a hyper sensitivity to protection of privacy and personal data? Personalization of sites is currently more difficult at the federal level because of the prohibition of cookies. This needs to be reviewed with citizen input.

Technology Impact Statement.

Economic Impact Statements are used to show the implications of an economic development project. Since the transition to electronic government is untested and unfamiliar to many, it is suggested that the program develop a “Technology Impact Statement” to illustrate the personnel changes, organizational restructuring, and financial impact (both savings and cost) that is likely to occur. Also, by extension, a “Public and Private Sector Impact Statement” should be prepared as well since the creation of electronic government initiatives, processes, and portals affects interagency and intraagency relationships as well as long-standing dynamics in the private sector.

Communications Strategies

Another important research issue is how government agencies and elected officials will communicate with citizens. “Proactive” communication to identify their satisfaction with a particular program; inform them of new laws and regulations; participate in online discussion; seeking input on legislation; or sending an online newsletter are effective ways to keep citizens informed but how can this be done without deluging the citizen who may interact not only with, for example, the US Small Business Administration but with the US Department of Commerce, and Department of Labor as well. Certainly government agencies and elected officials will want to communicate with their constituencies but to what extent? Will government assign an e-mail address and social security number at birth to ensure that they can communicate with their citizens? Just as citizens are “obliged” to check their post box every day, citizens will become de facto obliged to check their government e-mail account.

National Listing of E-Mail Addresses
Federal agencies and elected officials will soon realize the importance of keeping up-to-date e-mail addresses of their clientele base and constituencies, respectively. For example, if the US SBA had a listing of the 24 million small businesses—about 70 percent have email it is estimated—, they could communicate important developments regarding small businesses, involve them in online discussions, obtain feedback on proposed legislation, etc. Or should citizens be exempt from receiving this kind of information from agencies and elected officials? The answer is likely “no”. How, then, can the information flow be managed? Citizens do not want to be deluged with information that is not important to them and bureaucrats do not want to be burdened with answering their questions.

**Budgetary Savings**

Certainly e-government will realize millions of dollars in savings on paper, storage, filing, reduced duplication of services, increased coordination, and other efficiencies. It could be useful to do some good business cases with value propositions (already begun by the Quicksilver teams) which would present the savings expected, and showed how “traditional” government budgets have or will change/d. There are impact on both the service providers (agencies) and the service recipients (citizens, businesses).

**Reorganization of Government**

Certainly e-government will change the structure of government. Showing before, during, and after structural changes would be interesting as well. An interesting dynamic will rise between the conventional politics of place and space and how jobs might be impacted. For the most part, at the federal level at least, we are living with the federalist structure of the 70s and in the digital age, this no longer makes much sense—notwithstanding the views of at least 545 legislators on the Hill.

**Importance of Tracking Technology**

Each year the World Economic Forum identifies 100 of the most innovative technologies. It is important to keep abreast of these technologies, dream of how they might be applied to the electronic government, and to create partnerships with these innovators. Using best practices, develop with standards and off the shelf products, and prototype to learn are keys to success. Might be useful to study those projects that are doing this.

**Sharing Results with Other States and Other Countries**

It is a fact that most government employees do not regularly communicate with one another at vertical state-federal or horizontal fed-fed/state-state levels. The importance of sharing successes and frustrations with kindred state and federal agencies cannot be overstated. It is also axiomatic but often ignored that helping other countries establish such online systems contributes to the creation of better and more democratic institutions and, therefore, by extension, more peaceful ones.

**E-Government Forum**

Since electronic government is new to everyone throughout the world, why couldn’t an international matching system be developed so that anyone around the world can search by government function (e.g., Chief Information Officer); role (e.g., state or federal Department of Transportation); city, state, or country; type of technology used in development of the e-government system; sharing of best practices; licensing or buying existing software or platforms from the agency concerned; collaborating in the integrated development of a vertical (statewide) or horizontal (national or international) systems; or exchanging ideas. Theoretically, ALL government employees in the United States or throughout the world could be included. This could be easily achieved using modern technology and foster greater peace and understanding. Almost like an online Peace Corps.
Updating of Information

In order to ensure that online services, information, and maintenance of data are automated, reliable, responsive to needs, consistent in quality, valued, respected, and, most importantly, updated regularly, a system / policy / process / model / template must be developed. The key macro concerns of any e-government strategy must be that the site responds to the citizens’ needs, the material is updated on a regular and reliable basis, and the sites starting looking and feeling the same so the citizen can “feel” that they are at a familiar government site. But what is the structure to ensure that the sites are updated? Should any information not updated past x months be automatically updated? Should Congress require that all sites be updated by the first of each year, otherwise they will be shut down?

Human Element

Certainly the computer will reduce the regulatory burden while individuals will help increase the compliance rate. Let us not forget the human element which must be weaved into these often faceless systems.

Governance Structure of E-Gov (Quicksilver)

A very useful case study might be looking at the planning, implementation, and oversight of the 24 E-Gov initiatives and how the resources are being made available. The committees on the Hill have one notion, OMB has another. Agencies, in some cases are waiting to see how serious the effort is. In all instances, we are required to do value propositions, represent truly the user or citizen group, put on the “bigger govt hat and take off the agency hat,” and make available resources for other agencies and the states. For my case, managing the Business Compliance One Stop, I have 8 federal partners and a number of states to do both vertical one stop tools, online transactions, and knowledge management expert tools.