Community-Sourcing: Bridging Resources, Partnerships, and ICTs to Promote Transformative Government

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E-government and Libraries

- Broad in scope
  - E-participation/democratization
  - Open Government/transparency
  - Digital government information
  - Services
    - Informational, transactional, interactive

- Broad in participants
  - Individuals
  - Libraries
  - Agencies
  - Governments
  - NGOs
Libraries and E-government

- Broad in access points
  - Individual computers/laptops
  - Mobile devices
  - Intermediated
    - Libraries
    - NGOs

- ...So successful transformative e-government goes beyond government-public interaction and can involve a number of access mechanisms, participants, and venues
Why Libraries?

16,500+ libraries
Open to public often when government offices are not
Why People go to Libraries for E-government

- Lack access to computers and the Internet, which serve as a critical pre-requisite to engaging in e-government transactions
- Broadband in areas where not available at home
- Lack the technical skills to use the online services and resources
- Lack and understanding of civics and are therefore unable to discern between federal, state, or local government services and/or which agencies are responsible for which e-government services
- Are uncomfortable engaging in online interactions without guidance
- Are unable to engage in e-government services due to the lack of accessibility and usability of government websites in general and e-government services in particular
- Often face a range of social barriers to accessing and using e-government services such as trust, language, and culture
- Are specifically directed by an agency to obtain assistance from a library as opposed to the actual agency providing the service
The Study

- Focus on partnerships to transform e-government services
- Research Questions:
  - How are communities relying on public libraries to deliver access to and assistance with e-government information, communication, and services?
  - How are public libraries, government agencies, and other community-based organizations are working collectively to create e-government partnerships to better provide e-government information, communication, and services?
Methodology

- National survey of public libraries
  - September-November 2010
  - 7,500 responses, 85% response rate

- National grant to study e-government and library partnerships
  - Site visits
  - Interviews
  - Review of partnerships
Libraries and E-government

- What we know (www.plinternetsurvey.org)
  - Technology access
    - Libraries offer free access to workstations, broadband, and Wi-Fi
  - Training
    - Libraries offer a wide range of free computer and Internet use training
  - Expertise
    - Libraries offer expertise that helps people understand government and government services
  - Information
    - Libraries help people find and use government information
  - Assistance
    - Libraries help people understand and use government websites and services
  - Complete Forms
    - Libraries help people complete immigration and citizenship, social service, emergency benefit, and other online forms
E-government in Public Libraries

- 89.7% help people understand and use government websites
- 80.7% help people apply for E-government services
- 67.9% help people complete E-government forms
- 24.7% partnering with governments and other agencies
Libraries and E-government Partnerships

Some examples:

- The Alachua County Library District in Florida, which partnered with the Florida Department of Children and Families, as well as community organizations, to create The Library Partnership
  - The library provides space for agencies devoted to child welfare to offer assistance with accessing e-government forms and applications used by the organizations providing services at the center, as well as homework help, GED and literacy classes.

- The Austin Public Library in Texas partnered with the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) agency to create its New Immigrants Centers to provide resources and support for immigrants. These Centers provide a range of support services in multiple languages, including citizenship courses and test preparation.

- Hartford Public Library developed The American Place to create a robust immigration and pathway to citizenship service that involves English instruction, citizenship classes, and support with USCIS interactions.

- The Enoch Pratt Free Library (Baltimore, MD) has partnered with the Baltimore City Health Department and a grocery store to allow patrons to order groceries and have them delivered to the public library.
Partnership Benefits

- The ability to combine services with public access technologies and Internet access, which many of the users lacked elsewhere
- The ability to embed e-government services within a trusted and neutral community organization such as the public library
- The ability to create an integrated service environment that cuts across multiple agency services and benefits
  - Individuals often required multiple e-government interactions provided by different levels of government and agencies
- The librarian, whom served as an intermediary between e-government services and the user
- The ability to transform government services
Partnership Challenges

- Agencies, due to mandates and service authority constraints, focused on their own services and did not necessarily view the entire e-government spectrum that libraries faced in a public access service context.
- Partnerships are often associated with risk due to public scrutiny, and agencies were loathe to form partnerships and accept the risks that could manifest through partnerships.
- When willing to engage in partnerships, some agencies viewed the library as a means through which to offload agency workload rather than create a truly collaborative e-government service approach.
- Partnerships were evolutionary in nature, as both libraries and agencies learned over time the best ways to approach their collaborations.
Library Challenges – the need for Cooperation and Integration

- Libraries often lack wide-scale coordination with critical e-government service agencies (e.g., immigration, taxes, health, social services) which users most frequently seek.
- Librarians do not necessarily have expertise in the range of e-government services, resources, or applications necessary for users to access and successfully participate.
- Librarians may not understand the larger policy/governance/jurisdictional context of e-government (e.g., immigration policy; tax law; federal, state, local government).
Library Challenges – the need for Cooperation and Integration

• Libraries face a range of constraints, including
  ◦ Insufficient number of computers to meet patron needs
  ◦ Budgetary, space, and infrastructure challenges
  ◦ Inadequate bandwidth to meet increasingly bandwidth-intensive e-government services;

• Libraries experienced a significant increase in usage as a result of the recession

• Libraries are a service provider at the end of a vast e-government service environment
Critical Success Factors

- Both the library and the agency saw mutual benefit to entering into a partnership designed to provide collaborative e-government services and to redesign/rethink government roles and services.
- Agencies viewed the partnerships as ways through which to extend e-government services to the intended service recipients through libraries, rather than as a means to shift service provision costs to libraries.
- Agencies considered the library a true partner and considered librarian feedback regarding e-government service design and delivery.
- Agencies were willing to help librarians better understand the e-government services, resources, and technologies.
Critical Success Factors

- Agencies provided library-specific support (i.e., a separate help e-mail and phone number) through which librarians could contact agency staff for assistance.
- The library considered providing e-government services as part of its mission to serve the public.
- The library built a support infrastructure (e.g., information resources, technology training, staff assistance) around the e-government services.
Some Concluding Comments

- Successful e-government, among other things, implies
  - Equity of access – services, resources, and technologies
  - Ability to use technologies/services
  - Understanding of government organization

- Not all e-government transactions and interactions happen in a public-government scenario; there is often a need and desire for an intermediary

- Need to leverage government and community resources to ensure and enhance user participation
Some Concluding Comments

- Transformative government goes well beyond digitizing or porting services to an “e” access model
  - Requires rethinking of services
  - Reviewing new delivery approaches
  - Collaboration
  - Co-development
Thank You

- Questions/comments?

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