E-Government Partnership Projects:
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

January 21, 2012

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Introduction

As more government services go online, public libraries are critical access points to e-government services, programs, and information resources. An increasingly difficult service environment, characterized by surging library usage coupled with reduced funding, insufficient computer workstations, and limited staff to provide e-government assistance, has only amplified the need for more attention to the e-government role of public libraries. The relationship between users, libraries, and governments, however, is often characterized by many one-on-one interactions, resulting in costly duplication of effort and a piecemeal approach to serving and meeting user e-government needs.

According to the 2011 Public Library Funding and Technology Access Survey, nearly 90 percent of libraries assist the public with government Websites, close to 80 percent help with submitting e-government applications, and almost 70 percent assist with completing e-government forms (see Figure 1). This demonstrates a substantial need for enhanced e-government service funds, staffing, and resources for public libraries. In 2010, the American Library Association, Information Policy & Access Center (iPAC) at the University of Maryland, and the University of Illinois-Chicago, in partnership with the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS), the Internal Revenue Service (IRS), the Government Printing Office (GPO), five state library agencies, and several public libraries, received a grant from the U.S. Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) to develop a Web resource to promote and facilitate collaboration and partnerships between government agencies and public libraries. A primary goal of the Web resource is to aid public librarians in providing e-government resources to the public.

Public Libraries and E-Government: Critical Issues and Challenges

Although public librarians continually rise to meet the challenges faced in providing e-government services, they face difficulties in acquiring the necessary tools and training to effectively provide e-government resources to the public. The following figure illustrates the percentage of public libraries assisting with various e-government services:

![Figure 1. E-Government Services 2010-2011](image-url)

services to users, three areas of need have proven particularly difficult to overcome:

- Lack of access to the Internet or computers outside of the library;
- Lack of digital literacy skills needed to access e-government services; and
- Lack of basic literacy and/or civics literacy skills.

A deficit in any of these areas makes it difficult – if not impossible – for users to engage with government agencies via their e-government services. These access issues are compounded by different participation requirements for e-government services in different domains (e.g., immigration, taxation, and social services) and it can be overwhelming for individuals, particularly if they must interact with agencies at different levels of government (federal, state or local) in order to obtain e-government services. Members of the public come to the library with a range of e-government needs, from the very basic (i.e., setting up an email account) to the more complex (i.e., helping a relative immigrate to the United States). Ascertaining and meeting these needs can prove to be time consuming, challenging, and often beyond the ability of the library to completely resolve.

**Best Practices in Library and E-Government Services**

Public libraries with effective e-government programs:

- Incorporate e-government service provision into their institutional mission.
- Form partnerships with government agencies and non-governmental organizations that are already providing assistance to members of the public with e-government services in a particular area (such as immigration or taxation).
- Create user-friendly Websites and information resources that function as a gateway between e-government services and the individuals who need these services but struggle with how to access them.
- Provide users with opportunities to improve their language, digital literacy, and other skills through collection development, programs, and services.
- Create linkages to other library services to facilitate meeting the e-government needs of the public (i.e., holding story time while parents are in language or civics classes).
- Look to create a continuum of e-government services (i.e., becoming a passport center and/or incorporating voter registration as part of a larger immigration service set).
- Build infrastructures (e.g., information resources, technology training, staff assistance) to support e-government services.

**Essential Factors in Providing E-Government Service**

The project identified several factors in need of resolution in order to overcome existing e-government service challenges:

- Librarians indicated a need to further develop their professional e-government skills in order to better serve the public in this area.
- Building and maintaining relationships with government agencies providing or mandating
e-government services is increasingly necessary.

- Libraries need to be informed by agencies regarding changes to e-government services, mandates, and policies that may impact their interactions with e-government services.

- There is a pressing need to develop and publicize e-government service policies that focus on what the library will and will not assist with, including liability, privacy, and other concerns that surface as part of e-government transactions and services.

- Library e-government roles, which can vary from library to library, need to be clearly defined, articulated, and customized to the local service context.

Importance of Partnerships in E-Government Service

The importance of partnerships - particularly to underfunded and understaffed libraries - cannot be overstated. Public libraries have begun to join forces with community organizations and government agencies to better serve those in need of e-government services. The sharing of infrastructure, specialized knowledge, and information networks means that costs can be shared across multiple organizations while enabling services to be delivered with greater efficiency and effectiveness. Partnerships greatly increase the potential for positive impact upon those populations that have proven hard to reach or difficult to serve.

Building E-Government Partnerships

A major focus of the Web resource under development is to provide tools and strategies for libraries seeking to better meet their users’ e-government needs through partnerships with government agencies. To date, iPAC has identified a number of critical success factors for creating these partnerships, including:

- The collaborating agency views the partnership as a means to extend e-government services to the intended recipients through libraries, rather than as a means to shift service provision costs to libraries.

- The collaborating agency considers librarian feedback regarding e-government service design and delivery.

- The collaborating agency provides library-centric support (via dedicated email or phone line) through which librarians can obtain assistance from agency staff.

A partnership that incorporates these collaborative principles will be able to achieve a more robust experience for both service providers and users.

Public library partnerships with government agencies and nonprofit groups have increased 11.3% since 2008-2009.

Examples of Successful E-Government Partnerships

**Hartford Public Library (CT)**

The Hartford Public Library (HPL) illustrates how e-government reaches beyond the traditional scope of a public library. By utilizing innovative partnerships, local resources, and securing grant funding, the HPL has taken steps to create a community-wide approach that involves the USCIS, the school district, and non-profits to transform the ways in which its community accesses immigration information and obtains assistance. In addition, HPL serves as a passport center and facilitates voter registration. For an area with a large foreign-born population, such services are essential. Through The American Place, HPL facilitates immigrant transitions to the United States, and provides a range of information, services, and resources to support immigrant residency, citizenship, and related needs.

**Enoch Pratt Free Library (MD)**

The Enoch Pratt Free Library epitomizes how a library can go beyond the provision of traditional library services by working with government agencies and other organizations to improve the surrounding community in meaningful ways. “Baltimarket,” a service started by the Baltimore City Health Department in 2010, brings fresh foods to individuals in the Baltimore area currently living in underserved “food deserts. Through collaborations with Santoni’s Super Market, the Maryland Institute College of Art, and the Baltimore City Enoch Pratt Free Library System, residents can order groceries online at their local library and then collect their food on the designated pick-up day, which takes place once a week for one hour. Although the program does not deal directly with the project areas of immigration and taxes, it provides an ideal example of a quality partnership that seeks to transform the community.

**Pasco County Public Library (FL)**

The library was an early adopter of e-government and has shown statewide leadership in this area for several years. To the knowledge of the project team, Pasco is the first public library to create an e-government librarian position specifically focused on developing e-government resources and services and on working with the community and users regarding e-government. The library plays a role with e-government at both the local (http://pascolibraries.org/egovtools.shtml) and state (http://www.gethelpflorida.org/) levels. In addition, the library works with the local workforce center and has projects with local government agencies that include seeking grants, planning projects for combined services (e.g., library and government), and developing overall strategic initiatives to meet future needs of the county and its residents. The library also has engaged directors who see e-government as a way to demonstrate the value of the library to its residents and government officials.
About the Project

With the goal of helping libraries to better meet the e-government needs of users, the American Library Association and iPAC, through a partnership with a number of government agencies, public libraries, and academic libraries, is developing an e-government Web resource designed to foster collaboration among libraries and government agencies. Funded by the Institute of Museum and Library Services, the project began in December 2010 and will run until December 2013.

During the initial research phase of the project, the iPAC project team:

- Conducted an extensive review of the United States citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) and Internal Revenue Service (IRS) websites, as well as the websites of other government agencies and community organizations, to aid in the identification of currently available information resources and tools related to taxation and immigration.

- Identified a number of ongoing “best practice” e-government projects, activities and efforts at libraries across the country.

- Conducted site visits to a number of libraries that have been recognized as top e-government service providers relating to tax services, immigration services, and government-library partnership development.

Currently, the project team is working on the development of the Web resource and is in the process of making decisions regarding content and design. A model site should be ready for usability testing in February 2012, with the aim to introduce the resource to a broader audience in April 2012.

Planned Website Features

The following are current design plans that address the critical needs assessed and recommendations made over the past year:

1. In light of the importance of libraries having a thorough understanding of the salient issues affecting their communities, the site will include a section outlining steps on how to conduct a community needs assessment.
2. Complex e-government processes (such as those involved with immigration applications) will be diagrammed so as to highlight the library and/or community resources that are available to help users navigate the various stages of these processes (e.g., webinars created by government agency officials). By providing a tool that will help librarians determine at what stage a given user is in the e-government service process, librarians will not need to reinvent the wheel and start the entire process over with the user while helping the user to more expeditiously complete the process.

3. The site will provide suggestions for different levels of service ("getting started", "integrating services", and "transforming communities") so libraries can assess what they can do now to better meet the needs of the populations they are serving.

4. The site will provide a platform for libraries to develop a community of practice through which they can share their experiences and learn from one another so as to improve the delivery of e-government services.

5. The site will provide a range of resources aimed at helping libraries form a collaborative network with government agencies and/or community organizations, including a searchable “partner finder” through which libraries can locate available resources that will facilitate or enhance the e-government services that they seek to provide.

By applying the best practices learned through interviews, research, and site visits, the project team will implement a web resource that includes e-government best practices, suggestions, and strategies.

About the Project Partners

The American Library Association was created to provide leadership for the development, promotion, and improvement of library and information services and the profession of librarianship in order to enhance learning and ensure access to information for all. The current strategic plan, ALA Ahead to 2010, calls for continued work in the areas of Advocacy and Value of the Profession, Education, Public Policy and Standards, Building the Profession, Membership and Organizational Excellence.

The Information Policy & Access Center, housed within the University of Maryland, College Park’s iSchool, studies what policies and/or technologies lead to equitable and inclusive information access, a digitally literate population, and an informed and engaged public. iPAC aspires to be an innovative research and education facility that explores social, policy, and technology aspects of information access and use across cultural institutions, government agencies, and other information-based organizations.

The University of Illinois-Chicago is home to the Government Information Online (GIO) digital reference project (http://www.govinfo.org/), and will coordinate embedding GIO into the Web resource. GIO is a free online information service supported by nearly twenty public, state and academic libraries throughout the United States, that are designated Federal depository libraries in the U.S. Government Printing Office’s Federal Depository Library Program.

The Internal Revenue Service is a bureau of the Department of the Treasury. In fiscal year 2010, the IRS collected more than $2.3 trillion in revenue and processed more than 230 million tax returns. The mission of the IRS is to provide America’s taxpayers top quality service by helping them understand and meet their tax responsibilities and enforce the law with integrity and fairness to all.
The **U.S. Bureau of Citizenship and Immigration Services** is the federal agency that oversees lawful immigration to the United States. A component of the Department of Homeland Security, the agency provides services such as citizenship, immigration of family members, help with working in the U.S., verifying an individual's legal right to work in the U.S., humanitarian programs, adoptions, civic integration, and genealogy help.

The **U.S. Government Printing Office’s** core mission is *Keeping America Informed*, dating back to 1813 when Congress determined to make information regarding the work of the three branches of Government available to all Americans. The U.S. Government Printing Office (GPO) provides publishing and dissemination services for the official and authentic government publications to Congress, Federal agencies, Federal depository libraries, and the American public.

The **Connecticut State Library** is an Executive Branch agency of the State of Connecticut. The State Library provides a variety of library, information, archival, public records, museum, and administrative services for citizens of Connecticut, as well as for the employees and officials of all three branches of State government. The State Library also serves students, researchers, public libraries and town governments throughout the state. In addition, the State Library directs a program of statewide library development and administers the Library Services and Technology Act state grant.

The **Florida State Library and Archives** The Division of Library and Information Services is the designated information resource provider for the Florida Legislature and all state agencies. It also coordinates and helps to fund activities of public libraries, provides a framework for statewide library initiatives, provides archival and records management services, and preserves, collects, and makes available the published and unpublished documentary history of the state.

The **Maryland Division of Library Development and Services** guides and develops statewide Maryland public library network services through leadership and consultation in technology, training, marketing, funding, resource sharing, research and planning, so that Maryland libraries can fulfill their missions now and in the future to the people of Maryland.

The **New Jersey State Library** believes access to information and libraries empowers people, organizations and government. As leader of the more than 2,000 member libraries in the NJ Library Network, the State Library takes a proactive and innovative approach in guiding libraries and providing information to foster a literate, productive and competitive New Jersey.

The **Texas State Library and Archives** preserves the record of government for public scrutiny, secures and makes accessible historically significant records and other valuable resources, meets the reading needs of Texans with disabilities, and builds and sustains statewide partnerships to improve library programs and services.
Funding

The study is funded by a grant from The Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS). The mission of IMLS is to create strong libraries and museums that connect people to information and ideas. Through grants, research, and initiative activities, the Institute makes an impact in a number of diverse issue areas, among them 21st century skills, community and civic engagement, and lifelong learning.

About the Authors

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References and Related Resources


The Information Policy and Access Center (iPAC) is a response to the pressing need for research on the processes, practices, policies, and social issues that govern access to information in our increasingly digital information society. We at iPAC are committed to studying what policies and/or technologies lead to equitable and inclusive information access, a digitally literate population, an informed and engaged public, or access Internet-enabled resources and technologies, among key examples.

iPAC aspires to be an innovative and forward-looking research and education facility that explores social, policy, and technology aspects of information access and use across cultural institutions, government agencies, and other information-based organizations; communities; and populations.

iPAC focuses on three major areas of research and education:

- **Libraries, Cultural, and Public Institutions** – Research on institutions, such as public libraries, school library media centers, archives, museums, and government agencies that are the sources of information, resources, services, and unifying space within their communities.
- **Policy** – Analysis of the policies that shape the ways in which these institutions can serve their communities, as well as the roles of these institutions as access points for and providers of government and other information and services in society.
- **Diverse Populations** – Advocacy and emphasis on the ways in which institutions and policies can promote inclusive information access and services for individuals and communities, including the underserved, underrepresented, and disadvantaged by embracing innovative approaches to diversity.

Through these core aspects of cultural institutions, iPAC seeks to contribute to scholarship and the information professions at the international and national levels, while also serving the local needs of libraries and other cultural institutions in the Washington, DC metropolitan area and the state of Maryland.