

# Washington Geographic Information Systems Governance

**Category: Cross-Boundary Collaboration & Partnerships**

**Name of nominee(s):**

Washington Geospatial Portal Steering Committee (GPSC) and the  
Geospatial Information Technology Committee teams  
(Collectively the Washington Geographic Information Systems (GIS) Governance teams)

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## **Executive Summary**

When the COVID-19 pandemic swept the nation this year, assaulting the economy and transforming workspaces across all sectors, the state of Washington immediately began tapping into a ready asset for the sharing of critical data – a geospatial portal overseen by a unique shared governance model.

In quick order the state’s GIS teams with the Department of Military and Washington Technology Solutions (WaTech), along with their collaborative partners, were able to add statewide databases reflecting COVID-19 cases, available childcare facilities, food distribution centers, Wi-Fi hotspots and much more, providing rapid information for both emergency planners and the public at large.

The rapid availability of this data would not have been possible without the ongoing work and support of Washington’s GIS governance teams. One team is comprised of a steering committee with representation from 30 state agencies. This committee works on the day-to-day operations and shares best practices among the agencies to promote efficiencies. The leadership committee draws its membership from about 10 state agency chief information officers. This committee provides oversight and policy guidance as well as sets priorities for legislative requests.

The broader GIS community in Washington is served by the Washington Geographic Information Council, or WAGIC, which also includes representatives from other governmental entities including local agencies and higher education. Together, these teams work and collaborate on this critical technology for the state. The information-sharing helps build community among the state’s network of GIS professionals.

This nomination is for the Washington GIS Governance teams for recognizing that teamwork among agencies is critical for decision making, implementing innovative IT solutions and improving the delivery of government services to citizens. This team effort recognizes that the sum is greater than the parts. Encouraging cooperation among agency IT staff and multiple agency technology governance should be a priority for the nation and is already paying great dividends in Washington state.

## **CONCEPT**

The Geospatial Portal Steering Committee (GPSC) recognized that there were inefficiencies in how large geospatial datasets were stored and shared among agencies. Agency geospatial data was stored in a variety of locations, with variable standards and a confused customer base who didn’t know where to find authoritative data from state agencies.

This was a time-consuming and frustrating process for agencies and members of the public. The team worked methodically through the different websites and standardized on a single platform (<https://geo.wa.gov>).

Through that process, redundant data from the agencies were evaluated, consolidated and improved. As one example, before the business process improvements to data sharing, there were at least ten different county boundaries shared by different agencies. We now have one county boundary shared by the Department of Natural Resources, which is the authoritative source of the data and that all agencies and the public can use. This curation and looking for opportunities to consolidate data - and more importantly effort by many agencies - has significantly improved the data available to the state agencies and the public. The team documented the processes so that agencies new to GIS technology could join the data sharing using methods that are consistent with all other state agencies.

Once the team got its momentum from these successes, they were unstoppable. They developed tools to facilitate notifications of changes to data and application using surveys, dashboards and Microsoft Flow (Notification Dashboard). In this way, other agencies and the public could rely on the information provided, minimizing the need to download data onto each individual agency's servers. Team members developed workgroups to address implementation of new software versions, developed the first statewide plan for collecting high resolution elevation data for Washington and even hosted a middle school and high school competition using geographic information systems and supporting STEM education.

The Geographic Information Technology (GIT) Governance team is composed of CIOs and their representatives and handles such issues as prioritizing collective legislative needs, identifying the impact of a recent the IT position reclassification study on GIS professionals and budgetary considerations. The GPSC team receives guidance and direction from the GIT and serves as the "nuts and bolts" component of making shared services work each day. Together, these teams form the state GIS Governance team and have been working on shared services for more than 20 years.

## **SIGNIFICANCE**

Many of the Governor's priorities such as clean energy, protection of state natural resources, emergency management and growth management require coordination among state, local, tribal and federal agencies and specifically geographic data.

As one example, solar and wind power is generated primarily in eastern Washington, yet consumption is primarily in western Washington. In order to make decisions regarding infrastructure siting, common, authoritative data needs to be shared at all levels of government so that the focus can be on solving problems and not debating the data. This pattern repeats itself many times to solve problems Washington faces including recovery of salmon and southern resident Orcas and planning for growth in our cities.

The current coronavirus response has required data sharing from many different state and local data sources including location of childcare facilities for essential workers, distribution of personal protective equipment, case counts, hotspots for rural Wi-Fi access, food distribution centers, economic recovery and compliance metrics for Governor Proclamations. These data sharing protocols are needed for normal planning purposes as well as the ability to ramp up efforts when emergencies arise. Current efforts are to improve sharing publicly available data (geo.wa.gov). Future data sharing projects build on this success by creating common platforms for agency to agency data sharing as well as including local government data.

## **IMPACT**

Before the GIS Governance teams embarked on the geo.wa.gov platform, data was shared individually on each agency's websites and on three different state sites. The impact of this project was to standardize on a common platform. Since implementation, over 650 datasets have been shared by state agencies with approximately 40,000 users. The ability to use the same authoritative data that has governance regarding changes to the data, metadata requirements and update cycles has proven invaluable to agencies and the public who use a wide variety of data for decision making.

Visitors to geo.wa.gov can find place information both critical and useful. A hunter can find the boundaries of hunting areas set by the Department of Fish and Wildlife. A real estate agent can look up property parcel information and land values. A marine biologist can determine where Puget Sound kelp masses are located. Emergency managers can use the portal for disaster planning. The portal features a host of maps and imagery from numerous state and federal agencies.

All told the portal presents a single source of authoritative data from a variety of public sources.

The shared governance model was the subject of high praise in a recent service review of WaTech by Gartner, a global research and advisory firm specializing in information technology. In its findings, Gartner states: "Geospatial data is an enabler of open government and the OCIO plays an important role in enabling statewide geospatial governance."

So useful is the portal to Washington government and its residents that Gartner recommended that the service be expanded.

And in fact, there are plans to expand the portal in 2020 to include additional large datasets. The shared governance model will help ensure that when additional datasets, agencies and business needs arise, there is a structure to use and will provide even more value to the residents of the state.