

Title of Nomination: Fairfax County e-Government

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CATEGORY: Digital_Government_G_to_C

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2003 NACIO Awards – Digital Government: Government to Citizen

Executive Summary

The County's award winning e-Government program addresses the digital divide and has been successful in creating a "Government without Walls, Doors or Clocks". The e-Government program also strives to bridge the divide between governments with representation on local state task forces. The e-Government program utilizes multi-channel service delivery via the Web, 25 Kiosks, IVR, PDA's and a Cable TV government access channel. The Kiosks are in 15 libraries, three regional malls with six total Kiosks, two government centers, one transit center and one health center. In fiscal year 2002 after regular business hours, 31% of the e-Government transactions were made over the web, 15% made through the IVR and 18% done on the Kiosk. These numbers are expected to increase this year and next.

The e-Government program began in 1996, when the original Web site launched in June. The site provided information from ten County agencies and consisted of 600 pages. Currently the site consists of information from nearly 50 County agencies and has 15,800 pages of content at the same time in 1996, the Kiosk program and IVR program were rolled out.

In March 2003 the home page views for the County Web site were redesigned again from the result of feedback from the community and County departments. The new pages offer improved colors, navigation and updated links, as well as, a prominent place for Fairfax County news and emergency information. The home page views also now have prominent links to both the Commonwealth of Virginia and FirstGov.Gov Web sites to better facilitate access to other levels of government for our constituents.

Another improvement to the County's multiple channels for service delivery is the addition of PDA access to County Web information. This initiative launched in February 2003 as a pilot and will be further expanded over the next several fiscal years.

We are working to expand to our citizens and the business community the ability to pay other taxes, fines, fees, permits using the Internet, IVR or Kiosk. This will provide citizens and the business community with various alternatives in doing financial business with the County without having to stand in line. These additional payment transactions will be available via a central payment vendor that has contracted with the County.

A description of the e-Government program can be found in the County's IT Plan, which can be accessed at: <http://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/gov/dit/itplan.htm>. For a complete list of services available on each platform, please go to <http://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/gov/dit/publicaccess.htm>.

Problem or Challenge Addressed

Fairfax County, Virginia is a recognized international leader in e-Government. The Department of Information Technology (DIT) has developed a multi-channel program designed to meet constituent needs and to address the "Digital Divide." By reaching out to citizens through more than one channel, the County continues to be responsive and flexible in providing direct access to government information and services. Our goal is to have citizens access data and services from wherever they are and at any time. Fairfax County has built e-Government with 24 hour access, "Government without Walls, Doors, or Clocks".

With tight budgets, we are also forced to address Return on Investment on an annual basis. While information technology projects are intended to leverage current staff resources rather than replace them, the immediate and long-term prospects for the application of information technology in the area of e-Government are to limit the increase in staff needed to service a steadily growing population. We make use of public and private partnerships as appropriate.

Our e-Government program allows citizens to access services 24 hours a day, seven days a week at their convenience. This allows constituents to value their time and reduces some of the congestion on the highways. As opposed to having citizens come to County in person. For example, citizens can pay property and real estate taxes or apply for a county job, via the public website, using the Interactive Voice Response (IVR) system – (touch-tone phone access to transactions or information) or by visiting one of 25 interactive Kiosks. Most families in Fairfax County have two individual that work, so being able to access services at their leisure is a benefit.

The county makes it easy for citizens to stay connected with their government. We utilize a multi-channel service delivery approach via the Web, 25 Kiosks, IVR, PDA access and a Cable TV government broadcast channel. The Kiosks are in 15 libraries; three regional malls with six total Kiosks, two government centers, one transit center and one health center.

In fiscal year 2002 after regular business hours, 31% of the e-Government transactions were made over the web, 15% made through the IVR and 18% done on the Kiosk. These numbers are expected to increase this year and next.

The e-Government program reaches beyond the local jurisdiction by forming partnerships and collaborative relationships with other local, state and federal governments. One regional effort is the Kiosk program and is available at 25 County sites. The Fairfax County Kiosk program already has regional partnerships with Fairfax City, the Town of Warrenton, Inova Hospitals, the Town of Vienna, and is currently looking for more opportunities.

A description of the e-Government program can be found in the County's IT Plan, which can be accessed at: <http://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/gov/dit/itplan.htm>.

Groups Served by Program

The users who are served by these citizen-centric services and e-Government program are over 1 million County residents, as well as businesses, civic groups and other interested parties.

Fairfax County encompasses an area of nearly four hundred square miles. The County is highly automated and has been so since the 1970s. Our information technology is an essential tool, which enables departments to conduct business efficiently and effectively both internally and with the public. The Fairfax County e-Government initiatives comprise a multi-faceted strategy with a single goal: utilize the benefits of emerging technologies to extend and expand the ability

of government to provide information and services to County residents, businesses, civic groups and other interested parties.

Most families in Fairfax County have two individuals that work, so being able to access services at their leisure is crucial. e-Government projects significantly enhance the availability of County Government information and/or services to a broad segment of the public through information technologies that require limited staff intervention. A prime consideration in the development of the overall strategy was to ensure inclusion of all County residents, whether or not they have a computer and modem.

The overall goal for the e-Government program is to provide the public with responsive and flexible alternatives for obtaining information and services and to allow residents to conduct business with the County at their convenience. While these projects are intended to leverage current staff resources rather than replace them, the immediate and long-term prospects for the application of information technology in the area of e-Government are to limit the increase in staff needed to service a steadily growing population.

Using a multi-platform service delivery approach, we provide business transactions and information to our citizens, businesses and anyone else interested without matching the County's growth in population and businesses with growth in staffing numbers. Fairfax County has modernized its internal systems, hardware and infrastructure to ensure that IT serves both the County's internal and external users.

Goals and Objectives of the Program

The Fairfax County e-Government initiatives comprise a multi-faceted strategy with a single goal: utilize the benefits of emerging technologies to extend and expand the ability of government to provide information and citizen-centric services. The overall e-Government program that has been implemented is completely based on collaboration with end users and integrating technology into the County's business. This allows the County to transform its processes to more effectively serve internal users, constituents and businesses and to meet the County's service goals. This is true for DIT as well, so it does reflect the core mission of the organization.

The e-Government program is successful because of the following factors: support from elected officials, senior management, and constituents. Fairfax County makes a large overall investment in information technology and e-Government programs. The County has a solid information technology infrastructure and utilizes internal and external technology partners. Fairfax County measures the success of its e-Government program by reviewing results, usage and return on investment (ROI).

The County has achieved high ROI through its investment in information technology. From 1991 to 2001, Fairfax County's population increased 24 percent to over 1 million residents, 100 new County facilities have been added and a large number of businesses have moved into the County. This growth has meant increased service requirements for County government. In this same period, the County government added a net of approximately 124 positions. The ability of the government to serve the public in a time of tremendous growth without adding significant numbers of staff has depended on a well-planned investment in IT.

The web site averages over 625,000 visits per month, 7.5 million visits per year, 18.8 million hits per month, and 225.6 million hits per year. 476,000 visitors per year access multiple web pages and/or transactions.

The Cable TV government access channel offers 100 hours of original programming, 50 satellite training tele-courses and video support for Web and Kiosk applications, 147 hours of live

government meetings, 213 programs describing County services, 2500 bulleting board messages and 300 hours of captioned meetings.

The IVR systems received over 819,000 calls in fiscal year 2002 representing over 110 hours interacting with callers per day and collected over \$2,143,000 in fines, 499,000 calls alone were processed for the Fairfax County Courts representing 66 hours interacting with callers per day.

The e-Government program represents the use of technology to efficiently serve the public, so that staff can be redeployed to other specialized services and so that the growth of staff can be contained even as service levels increase.

This year, Fairfax County has also developed a mobile application for "Contact Us". This application provides access to the County's phone directory and email contact links through wireless devices such as a PDA or cellular phone. Citizens can "Search by Name" or view an "Alphabetical" list of all County phone numbers. The application allows users to contact agencies via email or phone depending on the device capabilities. This service provides the patrons with appropriate formatted information in a timely manner

Significant Benefits to Citizens

The main benefit to the citizens of Fairfax County is that we ensure widespread accessibility to our e-Government services and we have increased the number of available customer-centric interactions. Information requests and service oriented transactions are available the Web, Kiosks and IVR. Information is also available on the Cable TV and now PDA's for County citizen access.

While more than half of Fairfax County homes have an Internet connection, the County realizes the importance of providing wide access to our e-Government services. By providing services via phone, computer, Kiosks and information via Cable TV and now PDA's, we believe that all County residents have an excellent opportunity to utilize these services and access information. For those that do not have Web access or cannot travel to a Kiosk, we offer many services on our IVR systems. Information is available on all platforms, as well as, Cable TV and PDA's. In fiscal year 2002 after regular business hours, 31% of the e-Government transactions were made over the web, 15% made through the IVR and 18% done on the Kiosk. These numbers are expected to increase this year and next.

The Fairfax County Public Library plays an important role in this effort. Each library branch offers Internet access for library patrons. In addition, the Library is involved in several programs that demonstrate aggressive efforts to bridge the digital divide by providing access and training to individuals, who, due to various factors, such as language barriers, income, and age, do not have the normal access to computer technology that is standard in today's society. These programs make use of various partnerships and grants.

At many library branches, users speak little English, but the one word they do know is "Internet." Thanks to a grant from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, a small businessman checks prices on the Brazilian stock exchange; a senior citizen resigned to the fact that his sons insist on giving him a computer, decides to surprise them with his knowledge; and a teen volunteer teaches youngsters how to design their own Web pages.

Creativity and Innovation

The County is highly automated, information technology is integral to its mission and the County views IT in a strategic manner. The overall e-Government program that has been implemented is

completely based on collaboration with end users and integrating technology into the County's business. This allows the County to transform its processes to more effectively serve internal users, constituents and businesses and to meet the County's service goals without increasing staffing levels. All e-Government projects adhere to the strategic direction, standards and architecture, which are detailed in the CIO's annual IT plan, which can be found at <http://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/gov/dit/itplan.htm>.

The approach is one of strategic planning internally based on the direction taken for the County by the Board of Supervisors, collaboration with internal and external users through focus groups, a strong technical infrastructure and a focus on new technologies that will enhance the program.

Internally the Department of information technology works closely with the County's departments to prioritize new IT initiatives and e-Government applications. The County has a Senior IT Steering Committee, which works to interpret the Board of Supervisors' strategic direction and apply it to IT investment. The Board has also appointed a private sector IT Policy Advisory Committee (ITPAC) to give an external viewpoint and IT recommendations to the County's IT plans. All of this insures that many perspectives are considered as the County considers its IT direction and investment.

With the help of the constituent and business community and other parties interested in Fairfax County, the County staff redesigned its Web site in 2001 (and improved on this redesign in 2003) to be citizen-centric, erasing boundaries between County departments and featuring a much improved search engine and taxonomy. At the same time, the County's multi-media Kiosks were redesigned to incorporate a new technical architecture and user interface. We also continuously review and add applications to our popular IVR system.

In 2003 added PDA's to our multiple channels of e-Government service delivery. We are also now looking into Interactive Digital Television as an enhancement to our County public television station. This will make our information only Cable TV capabilities into an information and service channel.

The County's overall technology modernization program includes an emphasis on infrastructure improvement. This improvement is taken very seriously and provides a strong foundation for the IT investments the County makes and our e-Government program. The County has installed a Storage Area Network System (SANS); it has also installed Microsoft's SMS product and upgraded all of its Microsoft Products i.e. Windows 2000, Exchange 2000, etc.; created a server consolidation program; upgraded the current Wide Area Network (WAN); started a project to design a new WAN - a fiber-optic Institutional Network (I-Net), which will connect 400 County buildings; is installing Virtual Private Network (VPN) capabilities to better support remote users and telecommuters; and completed a County-wide telecommunications study. The County is also changing our Internet Service Provider (ISP) to provide better service to our customers, among other improvements. All of these infrastructure upgrades were necessary to ensure the County's ability to provide high quality service to our internal users and systems and our external e-Government users.

We select projects that make our internal staff more efficient and benefit the public. Examples are the expansion of our Land Development System (LDS) to include a new inspection system and

E-permitting, more E-payment transactions on our Web, Kiosk and IVR systems, through our partnership with a third party E-payment vendor (Govolution), an upgrade of our public service radio system, and upgrades to our public safety radio system and other systems initiatives.

An important initiative for the future is improving the overall IT architecture framework while transparent to citizens, integrating systems using a software engineering methodology is crucial to maintaining high quality applications. This will mean our systems will become more flexible and easier to add upgrades or enhancements. e-Government business processes will become more automated, for example, an e-purchase would automatically kick-off an update to inventory, which would kick-off an automatic re-order request. In this environment, it will become easier to take advantage of Web Service registries like UDDI and data-oriented markup languages like XML.

In these tough budget times, Fairfax County is involved in many partnerships to enhance its e-Government services. We have a centralized IT function and a centralized IT department, but have blended in-house development and support with staff augmentation and project partnerships with private sector firms. Our sourcing decisions are made on a project-by-project basis as we plan our IT investments annually.

Future Plans

Some of our major information technology projects related to e-Government include: selection of a new inspection system with e-permitting and wireless capabilities for the field; new e-Government capabilities for IVR, Kiosks, WEB, PDA's and Cable-TV (digital TV); expansion of our pilot online recordation of deeds projects; centralization of address records in our Geographic Information System; and Web enablement of mainframe legacy systems.

The replacement of Inspection Services Information System (ISIS) will allow us to implement e-permitting. This is a multi-year project that is a combine effort of several agencies. It is envisioned that the new system would provide online plan review capability, integrate with GIS to capture and present data in a graphical format and integrate with the current Land Development System (LDS). Our fire inspectors, health inspectors, land development inspectors and building inspectors will be doing more business via wireless handheld devices.

The County has a CRM contact tracking system, utilized by the Offices of the Board of Supervisors and County Executive and the departments and divisions for Legislative Tracking, Human Rights, Consumer Protection and Public Affairs and soon Public Works. Regarding Constituent Relationship Management (CRM), County agencies and DIT will continue to assess business processes within the County to maximize the opportunities for increased use of the existing system. A comprehensive and flexible workflow system will provide the tools needed to deliver strong citizen service and improved business processes. We expect to add workflow routing functionality, based on subject matter, in appropriate agencies. The individual workflows are generated by automatic importing, electronic messages or other communications, and are sent to appropriate staff members. We will add other modules to the existing system, including an Internet Mail Agent, which will manage and filter electronic mail.

The County is also investigating additional Geographic Information System (GIS) layers and an Integrated Document Management system using document-imaging technology.

Future services available via touch-tone phone IVR include a parking ticket payments line, a School Aged Child Care registration and payment line, a Sheriff's Office information line and a building plan review information line.

We will investigate offering E-services via interactive digital cable TV. An upgraded digital cable system in Fairfax County will allow citizens to interact with their government via their TV set, such as the ability to register for classes offered by Parks and Recreation to paying your personal property taxes. Citizens will be able to sign up for some services and do business with the County, pay bills and more.