NASCIO
Representing Chief Information
Officers of the States

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Getting Started in Cross-Boundary Collaboration: What State CIOs Need to Know

Imagine the following scenario – a child is missing and believed to have been abducted and taken across state lines. Almost immediately after determining an instance of abduction, an AMBER alert begins appearing on television screens around the state and surrounding region. Regular programming is interrupted on both television and radio. On highway signs, lottery tickets, wireless devices and the Internet, AMBER alerts are far-reaching and fast. These alerts cross state lines easily and can be received on a number of mediums. AMBER alerts have since saved the lives of over 200 children.[1]

This example of cross-boundary collaboration shows a glimpse of what can be accomplished for the greater good through collaboration among entities. By coordinating information technology, public safety organizations and the media, a child's chances of surviving abduction are greatly enhanced. What began as a lofty goal to communicate seamlessly among multiple entities has developed into a highly effective means of communication and a success story in cross-boundary collaboration.

What's In It For Me? Why a State CIO Should Collaborate

State CIOs play an important role in keeping their states innovative and cost-effective, and it is imperative that they consider cross-boundary collaboration as a means to achieving these goals. While it should be noted that cross-boundary collaboration is seldom easy to begin and challenging to maintain, if methodically approached and soundly executed, it can be the driver for innovation and growth. Collaboration is critical for success and is an inevitable part of the job of a state CIO. To better ensure success, state CIOs must carefully identify and consider the reasons and drivers behind collaboration and steps to take when embarking upon collaboration.

Cross-Boundary Collaboration, in the context of this brief, is a process in which two or more entities agree to cross organizational boundaries and combine resources in order to achieve joint goals. Public agencies are increasingly engaging in cross-boundary efforts, including horizontal partnerships between state agency-state agency, state agency-locality/tribal entity, state agency-federal government and public-private partnerships. There are many reasons to collaborate with the most common including:

- Cost reduction
- Establishing relationships between organizations
- Providing increased or better services to citizens
- Streamlining processes and speed transactions
- Improving information-sharing and quality
- Leveraging enterprise solutions
- Sharing risk
- Addressing fiscal constraints and lower administrative costs by leveraging mutual resources
- Taking advantage of enterprise information-sharing

Partnering with outside organizations: There are times when collaboration serves

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a purpose of *not* expanding government services, but rather making existing services more cost-effective by partnering with an outside organization, such as a 501(c)(3). In this case, the state CIO takes on a role of "steering" a collaborative effort rather than "rowing" the initiative on a day-to-day basis. States and state CIOs provide vision and strategic direction, while another entity does the heavy-lifting of implementation and maintenance. When steering organizations are able to focus on "big picture" aspects of collaboration rather than the minutiae of day-to-day functions, they are better able to focus on accountability and can be more flexible in meeting the needs of their citizens.[2]

Technology is an essential enabler between two or more agencies seeking to share data or services. However, to begin and sustain a successful collaboration, there must be sound policy in place as well. In many instances, the technology that would enable the collaboration to occur already exists; the challenge lies in bringing together all stakeholders and determining a clear business case for collaboration. However, there are many instances in which collaboration begins without this careful consideration. **Often, the drive to collaborate is born from a crisis situation that pushes an issue to the forefront of an agenda.**

These crisis situations may include natural disasters, national security events, and other physically devastating events that an agency or organization may face. Other crisis situations, such as a financial crisis, may not involve lives at stake but affect the quality of service and citizen trust. While a crisis situation is never desired, the solutions they generate can frequently turn out to be beneficial. A situation requiring immediate attention can provide a needed boost for initiatives that may have otherwise been put on the shelf. Sometimes, they even open the door to a valuable and lasting collaboration.

How Massachusetts Turned a City's Financial Crisis into a Successful Collaboration: In 2004, the Commonwealth of Massachusetts placed the city of Springfield, which was having a fiscal crisis, under the control of the state Financial Board. A significant factor in Springfield's financial situation was extremely outdated information technology systems that were long overdue for renovation. Because much of the city's information technology environment was nearing obsolescence, the state helped the city overhaul its IT solutions and educate staff members to adapt to newer technologies. By the spring of 2006, from an IT perspective, the city was back on its feet. The state assisted Springfield in hiring a new CIO, instituting a new payroll system, providing more financial control and helping to implement IT staff changes.

While not an ideal scenario, the partnership that was formed out of necessity has grown into one that is of mutual benefit. Representatives from the city sit on the state Enterprise Security Board, and the city now does all purchasing through state contracts – which had not been the case previously. While the state still serves as an advisory resource to Springfield, the city is able to stand on its own. The state and city maintain a good relationship and it is viewed as an equally beneficial collaboration for all. This serves as an example of a partnership that was created from an undesirable situation but developed into a successful collaboration.

In Massachusetts, the case for collaboration was clear. There was a need that required intervention beyond the capabilities of just one entity. Outside of a financial crisis or a public safety risk, the case for and against collaboration must be deliberated and discussed. It is important at the onset of collaboration to acknowledge and address potential obstacles and pitfalls that may be presented along the road to collaboration. While all collaborations will face challenges, it is essential to address key areas before beginning a collaborative effort.

Cross-Boundary Collaboration: Top Ten Considerations for State CIOs

There are a wide range of questions that must be answered before a state CIO can begin tackling a collaborative project. While there are many different types of collaborations, a series of common steps must be taken before a collaboration of any kind can begin.

1. **Define Goals:** Defining the goals of the collaborative effort is one of the important first steps in collaborating. Establishing success criteria and defining what each organization hopes to achieve are essential parts of making the business case for collaboration. This will help long-term in making sure that important milestones and benchmarks are being met on the way to achieving the ultimate goal. Understanding the issue or problem to be solved, as well as the goals to be achieved, are essential.

2. **Make A Business Case:** In establishing a business case for collaboration, it is important to include standard business case elements such as:
   - Business Impact
   - Benefits
   - Sensitivity, Risk & Contingencies
   - Implementation Plan
   - Estimated Timeline
   - Estimated Budget/Cost
   - Total Cost of Ownership
   - Return On Investment[3]

   The challenge of building the business case for collaboration is conveying the message that while working across boundaries may take more time due to various stakeholders involved; it will ultimately result in greater benefits, lower cost and better service outcomes than if the efforts were done in a siloed, unrelated fashion. Making a sound business case will help ensure the collaboration will be considered a "win-win" scenario by all involved and will be sustained over time.

In some cases, collaboration will begin with laying out a sound business case with a formalized budget and resources. In other instances, collaboration begins informally and a business case evolves over time. In the case of a crisis event, the collaborative efforts required to respond quickly and effectively often have immediate buy-in and there is neither time nor necessity for a business case. *However, whenever possible, state CIOs should strive to lay out a strong business case at the outset of collaboration in order to ensure a greater likelihood of buy-in from decision-makers.*

3. **Gain Executive Buy-In and Support:** Elected officials, even if they are open to collaboration, must be convinced of the potential for success of a collaboration initiative and confident in its benefits before agreeing to enter into a partnership. Elected officials tend to focus primarily on the risk factors of collaboration; therefore, it is essential to give a presentation of both risks and incentives to the proper decision-makers in demonstrating the business case for collaboration. In some instances, elected officials may immediately have an adverse reaction to exposure and autonomy and may feel that an entity's unique nature would be threatened. Negotiation skills are crucial during this stage, since one must be ready to outline the advantageous aspects of collaboration.

4. **Understand the Environmental Landscape:** Having a clear understanding of the political environment that one faces when attempting collaboration is crucial to the eventual success of the initiative. There are times when IT departments may be agreeable to collaborating, but elected officials will hinder the process. Animosity may exist between agency heads or elected officials that is not always clear at the onset of a project.

Be aware of political ramifications faced when collaborating in regards to legislative bodies that must be persuaded. Particularly at the local level, not many decisions are made without elected officials' approval. In these cases, it is particularly important to have an understanding of the political playing field. Find out which officials have campaigned against each other, or have sour relationships due to other reasons, and simply will not be open to working together.

5. **Determine Governance:** Experiences in public sector cross-boundary collaboration demonstrate that a sound governance structure is critical to success and should not be left up to chance. A clear and representative governance model reflecting the diverse leadership among the entities that are collaborating is one of the most important first steps. Even the best intentions can fail if each organization involved is unclear which entity is spearheading the project, or if each organization thinks that it is the leading body. Developing a charter at the outset of collaboration can be a beneficial way to establish rules of engagement. Involving stakeholders at the very beginning of the project, and keeping them informed throughout the life of the collaboration, can prove to be an important asset in maintaining momentum and progress.

Since most cross-boundary collaboration starts informally and on a voluntary basis, the governance model is not always immediately clear. However, cross-boundary collaboration is "a frontier with all the newness, excitement, innovation and disorganization that it implies, and it will require negotiation."[4] Establishing governance is a crucial part of the initial negotiation process since collaboration often requires seed money in order to begin. A governance body, if well-developed, can make tough decisions on shared accountability and shared investment decisions.

6. **Examine Statutory Limits:** When considering collaboration, it is important to closely examine the statutory limitations that may already be in place. In some states, there could be privacy or security requirements regarding an agency performing a function or sharing sensitive data it administers. Addressing the legal authority for a specific agency to support a collaborative effort is a critical step at the beginning of a collaboration attempt, because the policy and standards already in place may affect the level of interoperability between two or more entities.

The signing of a MOU (memorandum of understanding), or similar type of agreement, can serve as a way to facilitate information-sharing while maintaining the confidentiality of sensitive information. Consultation with the state Attorney General's office or executive general counsel for an opinion may be helpful in navigating legal obstacles. Additionally, if federal money is being used, consultation with the federal partner is required to understand any limitations this funding stream might unintentionally create.

7. **Establish Fiscal Responsibility:** Similar to establishing governance, it is important to determine which entity is taking on fiscal responsibility or if it will be a shared investment. Insufficient funds can cause a project to collapse. Each entity's examination of its financial capabilities and constraints at the beginning can prevent the negative attention a project may attract if it has to fold due to inadequate resources.

While financial issues can enable collaboration, they can also be its main impediment. The monetary demands that collaboration may place on one or more organizations can encumber a project before it even begins. Asking whether or not the benefits will likely be substantial is an important question for leaders to answer

before collaborating. Similar to establishing goals and success criteria, each entity must believe that its problem will be addressed by collaboration, instead of hindered by a perception of increased bureaucracy that collaboration may bring.

8. **Build Trust:** Establishing trust between two or more entities that want to collaborate can be a major hurdle that must be overcome before actual work can begin. In both intra-governmental and public-private partnerships, the different entities may be wary of one another, and this wariness may affect the outcome of a collaboration attempt.

Private sector entities often seek value for shareholders while government entities may seek to maximize scarce budgetary resources. Trust issues may be created by these distinctly different bottom lines, yet both sectors may wish to solve the same problem or issue. Additionally, collaboration between different governmental branches, or even horizontal collaboration, can harbor trust issues between the partnering entities. The acrimony between agencies can sometimes be greater than with public-private partnerships.

Underlying suspicion of partnerships with other organizations can lead to distrust and may cause frustration among the entities attempting to collaborate. Important concepts to remember when establishing trust in any partnership are:
- Trust but verify
- Examine the risks to both sides and determine how to minimize or address them
- Have a common plan for handling the relationship from start to finish
- Require audits and assessments and monitor the access given to the other party[5]

9. **Communicate the Benefits:** Upon agreement to engage in collaboration, communication is a crucial success factor. It is not only important to build trust between the entities attempting to collaborate, but also within each participating organization. There may be lingering doubts from individuals within an agency regarding the decision to collaborate, and it is important to address these hesitations before they develop into major concerns. Keeping lines of communication open, and engaging all stakeholders will play a big part in establishing a successful collaboration.

When collaborating between agencies or in public-private partnerships, it is important to document the needs and requirements of all individual entities for specific projects. Establishing metrics regarding what each is trying to achieve and a plan for measuring them is important in the beginning of a collaboration, since collaborations can take a long time to develop. During the development phase of collaboration, it is essential to update elected officials and agency heads regularly and communicate progress. Success often depends on how well managers can leverage technology, organizational, and human resources in coordination with collaborating partners.[6] Frustration can result if a long-term collaboration seems to extend for substantial periods of time with seemingly no benefit. Pulling the plug on a project before it is finished due to a lack of understanding can result in a loss of revenue and loss of trust in the collaborating entities.

It is essential to remember that the benefits of collaboration can be both tangible and intangible. Quantifying intangible benefits can be a challenge. In some collaborative efforts, much of the early work is building a foundation, and the benefits at this stage are frequently less tangible. Once the foundation has been established, the tangible benefits become more apparent. It is crucial not to falter during the initial stage when critics will likely

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be most vocal and decry a "lack of value." For these reasons, continuous communication throughout the life of the collaboration is essential for consistent support from all organizations and stakeholders involved.

10. **Evolve to a Networked Community of Practice:** A Community of Practice (CoP) structure is a natural way to begin the collaborative process. By aligning agencies that share similar lines of business, bridges begin to develop between agencies on regular and routine tasks and projects. Working together becomes commonplace. The identification of common goals becomes an obvious, voluntary starting point as opposed to a coercive mandate. In Pennsylvania, each CoP's jurisdiction includes all agencies under its certain criteria. For example, the Public Safety CoP includes all agencies that are responsible for upholding laws.

That CoP's goals seek to connect IT and business through:
- Facilitation and creation of business architectures and business process models
- Identification of information brokering
- Sharing services based on business function verticals and maintaining open lines of communication.[7]

One reason this helps collaboration is because a CoP will share the business problem up front and define the problem the agencies are trying to solve together.

Michigan Collaboration Flourishes: Recently, Michigan embarked upon an innovative collaboration among the Department of Information Technology's Office of Technology Partnership, the Michigan Township Association, the Michigan Municipal League, Michigan State University, Central Michigan University, Northern Michigan University, and Western Michigan University in order

to increase local townships' Web presence.

This partnership brought students from Michigan universities together with localities to assess and create websites for townships that may not have the capacity or resources to do so themselves. The students trained township staff on how to maintain their websites. According to the 2004 Cyber-State.org e-Government Review & Survey, only 29 percent of Michigan's local units of government had a Web presence, despite an increase in citizen demand for information and services online and Michigan residents' desire for government services to be delivered online.

This collaboration has proven very successful, with students gaining a chance to apply their talent in a real-life scenario, while providing localities a needed boost in visibility online. To date, more than fifty localities now have websites thanks to this ongoing collaboration.[8]

Michigan's multi-jurisdictional collaboration is just one example of what can be accomplished if many different organizations join together to achieve a common goal. Bringing more local communities online allows them to become better connected with their citizens and those beyond their city limits. The students that participated in the initiative gained valuable real-world experience, and it provided a unique opportunity for the educational, state and local systems to come together to accomplish a shared objective.

Cross-Boundary Collaboration in Health and Law Enforcement

The recent health information technology (health IT) movement is one example where the ROI seems too far away and not significant enough to encourage investment in certain initiatives. Health IT requires multiple entities to collaborate and reach across organizational boundaries to share sensitive data and patient information with one another. Health

information exchange initiatives not only require branches of government to come together, but require them to partner with private hospitals and physician offices. Private practices may be uneasy about entering into a partnership with each other, in addition to partnerships with public agencies.

On a broader scale, health information exchange efforts hope to eventually allow not only hospital and physician data to be shared with one another through an interoperable network, but to also make the data interoperable across state lines and available to virtually any provider who may treat a patient no matter where he or she is located. While this goal is several years away from being attained, it remains a relevant example of public-private partnership and collaboration across many types of organizational lines.

In the law enforcement arena, the U.S. Department of Justice has led the Global Justice Information Sharing Initiative to promote the broad scale sharing of justice and public safety information within and among levels of government. It promotes standards-based electronic information exchange and is an example of a successful collaboration between many different types of agencies and jurisdictions. Comprised of more than 30 independent organizations, the Global Advisory Committee (GAC) represents:

- Law enforcement agencies
- Prosecutors
- Public defenders
- Courts
- Corrections agencies
- Probation and parole departments
- Additional agencies directly involved in the justice process[9]

These two examples of cross-boundary collaboration highlight an important point to remember. ***Cross-boundary collaboration might have not only tangible or cost-saving benefits, but intangible benefits as well. Saving citizens' time, or even raising the likelihood of saving their lives, is difficult to record and impossible to measure.***

A New Way of Governing: Why State CIOs Need to be Prepared

Collaboration comes in many forms whether it is vertical or horizontal across organizations. A new wave of horizontal collaboration has crashed on the shore in the form of Wiki's, social networking websites such as Facebook and Myspace, blogs, and discussion forums. These online outlets allow any user, anywhere, to share their lives virtually and reveal thoughts on topics of interest. Wiki websites encourage users to share information by allowing individuals to collaboratively contribute their knowledge on any given subject. These websites, like the popular online encyclopedia, Wikipedia, streamline shared information into an easily accessible format by allowing anyone to edit any page with the click of a mouse.[10]
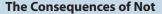
This type of mass collaboration is unprecedented and, as the world grows smaller thanks to technological innovation, citizens have come to expect many services to be streamlined and accessible at their convenience. Expectation of government services is proving to be no exception and cross-boundary collaboration can play a crucial role in enhancing those services. As public servants, state CIOs have an obligation to enhance the greater good by improving the lives of citizens. Cross-boundary collaboration can be a means to achieve this. There are already examples of virtual agencies such as Recreation.Gov which serves as a way for users to gather information about state and national parks, forests or wildlife refuges by combining information from both national and state agencies.[11]

It is crucial that state CIOs be prepared to engage in collaboration with other branches of government and public-private or non-profit partnerships. For state CIOs, being prepared to collaborate often requires competence beyond technical skills such as providing leadership and vision, relationship management and negotiation and communication skills in order to clearly convey the benefits of

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collaboration. These skills are critical for collaborating between organizations. *State CIOs must have the dexterity to exhibit these qualities in order to ensure a successful collaboration.*

Successful collaborations are often those that are meticulously planned and executed after careful thought. By following a series of steps, like the ones in this brief, state CIOs can better prepare for collaboration and better enable collaborative success. *As state CIOs, you can help ensure that your state is moving forward in innovative and creative ways by seeking opportunities and engaging in cross-boundary collaboration.*

The Consequences of Not Collaborating: Each kind of collaboration across organizational boundaries requires different approaches and presents unique challenges. Yet despite these challenges, it is important to closely examine the consequences of what may happen if a state CIO chooses not to collaborate.

If the obstacles appear too demanding, or if the benefits of collaborating can not be readily determined, it can be easy to decide against collaboration. Not embarking on collaboration efforts can save an organization from potential risk factors. However, not taking these risks can prevent an agency from achieving its goals and objectives.

State CIOs must not shy away from potential innovation for reasons of difficulty. If state CIOs choose not to collaborate, they may face fragmented services and increased costs of providing services.

Appendix A: Additional Resources

NASCIO Resources

Business Case Basics and Beyond: A Primer on State Government IT Business Cases, February 2003:
https://www.nascio.org/publications/index.cfm

Keys to Collaboration: Building Effective Public-Private Partnerships,
June 2006:
http://www.nascio.org/publications/documents/NASCIO-Keys%20to%20Collaboration.pdf

NASCIO Cross-Boundary Collaboration Award Winners

California Statewide Information System for Prenatal and Newborn Screening Program:
http://www.nascio.org/awards/2006awards/collaboration.cfm and
http://www.nascio.org/awards/nominations/2006California2.pdf

District of Columbia Safe Passages Information System:
http://www.nascio.org/awards/2006awards/collaboration.cfm and
http://www.nascio.org/awards/nominations/2006WashingtonDC2.pdf

Other Resources

Center for Technology in Government; University at Albany, SUNY
"New Models of Collaboration: An Overview," October 2004:
http://www.ctg.albany.edu/publications/reports/new_models_exec/new_models_exec.pdf

Leadership for a Networked World; Executive Education Program; John F. Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University:
http://www.lnwprogram.org/
A list of publications can be found at:
http://www.lnwprogram.org/publications_publications

IBM Center for The Business of Government; "Forum: Collaborative Governance," Spring 2007:
http://www.businessofgovernment.org/pdfs/BOG_Spring07.pdf

IBM Center for The Business of Government; "The E-Government Collaboration Challenge: Lessons from Five Case Studies;" Jane Fedorowicz, Janis Gogan, and Christine Williams, Bentley College, 2006:
http://www.businessofgovernment.org/pdfs/FedorowiczReport.pdf

"The Price of Government: Getting The Results We Need in an Age of Permanent Fiscal Crisis," David Osborne and Peter Hutchinson, Perseus Books, New York, 2004.

Appendix B: Endnotes

[1] For more information regarding AMBER alerts, please visit: <http://www.amberalert.gov>.

[2] "The Price of Government: Getting The Results We Need in an Age of Permanent Fiscal Crisis." David Osborne and Peter Hutchinson, Perseus Books, New York, 2004.

[3] "Business Case Basics and Beyond: A Primer on State Government IT Business Cases," NASCIO, February 2003, <https://www.nascio.org/publications/index.cfm>.

[4] "A Sobering Challenge," Public CIO, Jerry Mechling, Harvard University, Kennedy School of Government, August 2005, <http://www.public-cio.com/story.php?id=2005.08.03-96153>.

[5] "Securing Your Partnerships: Managing Security Risks for Public-Private Partnerships," Ann Garrett, North Carolina Chief Information Security Officer, presentation at NASCIO Midyear Conference, 2006, <http://www.nascio.org/events/2006Midyear/presentations/060602-1015%20Partnerships-Garrett.pdf>.

[6] "New Models of Collaboration: An Overview," Center for Technology in Government, University at Albany, SUNY, October 2004, <http://www.ctg.albany.edu/publications/reports/new_models_exec/new_models_exec.pdf>.

[7] "The Commonwealth of Pennsylvania's Keystone Plan (2006-2009): The Evolution of Citizen Centric Government Services, <http://www.portal.state.pa.us/portal>.

[8] "Partnership Leads to More Online Communities," Michigan Department of Information Technology, Press Release, September 12, 2006, <http://www.michigan.gov/dit/0,1607,7-139-30636_30640-151230—,00.html>.

[9] "US Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Information Technology Initiatives, Global Justice Information Sharing Initiative, <http://it.ojp.gov/topic.jsp?topic_id=8>.

[10] About Wikipedia, <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:About>.

[11] IBM Center for The Business of Government; "Forum Introduction: Toward Greater Collaboration in Government," John M. Kamensky, 2007, <http://www.businessofgovernment.org/pdfs/forum07.pdf>.