

***IMPROVING COMMUNITY ACCESS TO  
GOVERNMENT SERVICES -- REACHING OUT  
TO CITIZENS IN A DIGITAL WORLD  
WORK TEAM REPORT***

***HOW CAN THE CITY IMPROVE ACCESS TO INFORMATION  
AND SERVICES USING TECHNOLOGY TO HELP  
CONSTITUENTS CONDUCT THEIR MUNICIPAL BUSINESS?***

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# IMPROVING COMMUNITY ACCESS TO GOVERNMENT SERVICES -- REACHING OUT TO CITIZENS IN A DIGITAL WORLD

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## Executive Summary

Minneapolis needs to invest in an enterprise-wide project to expand the way it delivers services. Using the Internet and the World Wide Web, City services can be available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week -- and can be delivered reliably and consistently to any computer or Internet-enabled device. Moving government services to the Web makes the City more efficient and responsive to the needs of its community.

### Case Study

A study in March 2000 of phone companies showed that traditional billing (printing, mailing, processing and collecting) costs \$2.50 per month. Web-based billing costs 20 cents.

Done right, Web service does not distance the City. Rather, it personalizes service for each individual, makes it more accessible and convenient, and demonstrates responsible government.

Web service can streamline business processes, reduce waste, and save money -- sometimes dramatically. In turn, the reduced traffic on the phone and through front offices benefits everyone. With shorter lines and fewer callers on hold, City employees have the time to focus on service.

For the City to realize these advantages, it must have a unified strategy. Projects and components must fit seamlessly together, share common systems, and integrate with various data sources. Policies and standards are necessary. Current business processes must be examined, and savings opportunities identified and prioritized.

We will build on the successes of the past -- our current Web sites (both internal and external), our enterprise IT strategies, the successes of other organizations, other Citywide service improvement initiatives. We will coordinate with initiatives outside the City -- with other local government agencies, and with counties, state and federal agencies. And we will partner with our communities to ensure that they get the best value for their tax dollars.

As a whole City, we must support a common vision for electronic service, from elected officials and department heads to every front line worker.

To facilitate this change, investments must be made. The initiative is expected to require \$500,000 in 2001. Specific Web-based projects and infrastructure have been proposed as part of the SISP planning process.

### Case Study

Since putting its assessed property data online, the Dakota County Assessor's office has seen call volume drop 20 percent.

Without this investment, the City risks silo development of self-service initiatives that are not consistent, vary in their usefulness, are not supportable within the enterprise IT strategy and present a confusing face to the community. We will be less attractive to businesses and residents. We will not have kept pace with customer expectations or provided the best possible service.

## ***Part One: Community Access Initiative***

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### **Introduction**

We live in a fast-paced, digital world. People are struggling to balance work, family, school and other responsibilities -- and it doesn't all fit into daylight hours. Busy people have found they can use the Internet to do their banking at midnight, search for a day care center on Sundays, or read the latest health news. It's comfortable, convenient and accessible -- and it saves money.

Government is faced with increasing challenges and shrinking resources. If you've spent any time waiting in line or being on hold for service, you know that the traditional methods of delivering service -- in person -- are overloaded. In the past, the solution has been to hire more people. But in the current labor market, new employees are hard to find. And in the City, 20 percent of the current staff could retire in the next few years. If we're going to continue to provide excellent service, we must find a better way.

The Internet provides the way -- through direct access to services. By making services available via the Web, we can transform the relationship between government and our customers. The City's home page will become a "virtual City Hall" -- a citizen's direct link to information and services.

For the community, Web services provide:

- "Always on" service -- Web services are available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week
- Convenience -- no more looking for a parking spot
- Accessibility -- even for those with mobility impairments
- Personalized, customer-oriented service
- Consistent service and communication
- Speed -- no waiting in lines or on hold

For City government, Web services provide:

- Reduced transaction costs -- 70% reductions are common
- Streamlined and automated business processes
- Fewer routine phone calls and desk visits
- More time to handle complex requests

Reaching out to the community requires an enterprise-wide initiative to add interactive services to the City's Web site. Work is already beginning, with data lookups -- like the property info application (CNAP) -- and service requests -- like the graffiti report form. We need to continue these and other efforts in 2001 and beyond and look for innovative ways to connect with the people we serve.

Here in America, a revolution in technology is underway. It is more than a time of innovation, it's a time of fundamental transformation, the kind that happens, at most, every hundred years. ...We can seize the potential of this information revolution to widen the circle of our democracy and make our government much more responsive to the needs of our citizens.

-- President Clinton, June 2000

## ***Bridging the digital divide***

Government is for **all** the people -- even those who don't have computers or don't know how to use computers. For electronic government to succeed, it must reach as wide an audience as possible.

In March 2000, local surveys showed that more than 50 percent of Twin Cities residents had Internet access at home or at work. According to *Yahoo! Internet Life* magazine, that places the City tenth among wired US cities. City residents without access can get it through free public access terminals at their local library, and assistance is available for those who wish to learn more.

It's an excellent start, and one that is getting a lot of use. But we must continue to support public access and education programs so that all people can benefit from our electronic initiatives.

### **Building Public Access**

The Atlanta Community Technology Initiative (<http://www.atlantacommunitytech.com>) is bridging the digital divide by creating opportunities for public access and education on how to use it.

The City has partnered with Gateway, Earthlink and Skilllearning.com and has invested \$8.1 million from the cable franchise. The project has opened two community technology centers and has operated summer Cyber Camps for various age groups to provide education on how to use the Internet.

### **Better service for all -- even those not online**

If providing Web services reduces the number of callers, those still using the phone can get through faster. Similarly, shorter lines in the front office make for faster service.

When the Dakota County Assessor made property information available online, they noticed that the people challenging assessments had already researched property values, which meant faster resolution for many of the disputes.

## Part Two: Background

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### The digital frontier

The Internet has matured into a vibrant resource for information and services, and Minneapolis needs to change to stay with it.

- More than 9 million women went online for the first time in the last 6 months
- On an average day, 6 million Americans visit a government Web site.
- Of those with Internet access, 47% have visited a government Web site at least once.
- Citizens are calling for easier, convenient access to services (why isn't the City more like banks and utilities?)
- Other agencies are moving to online service
- Staffing shortages require more efficient service

### City of Minneapolis Web Site

- City Web site receives nearly 100,000 visits per month
- More than 1,200 Web pages of information
  - Information about City services and projects
  - City Council agendas and actions
  - Job openings and information
  - Up-to-the-minute Snow Emergency information
  - Comment forms and e-mail addresses
  - Police and Planning statistics

#### Examples

- Request Service or Complaint Form  
*Currently available: graffiti report form, environmental quality complaint, form to send e-mail to an elected official*
- Data Lookups  
*Planned for 2000: property information*
- Transactions, such as online payments  
*Proposed for 2000: utility billing*
- Citizen Participation, such as surveying or electronic voting  
*Planned for 2000: Audio/video of Council Meetings*

### Transforming government

Increasingly, governments and businesses are moving beyond static displays of information, providing direct services via the Web. Why? Self-service is a proven way to save money while providing better service.

In the process, these organizations are undergoing a significant transformation. They are evaluating their business models, streamlining their processes, finding new efficiencies, and strengthening their customer services.

## **Saving money**

The early leaders in Web-based services have reported enormous savings. Over-the-counter transactions can cost from \$2 to \$8, while Web transactions run just pennies. Savings are coming from:

- Reduced phone calls
- More efficient use of staff time
- Reduced or eliminated printing and postage
- Reduced or eliminated data entry
- Reductions in staff (typically front desk, clerical and administrative positions)

## **Building unified government services**

One of the frustrating aspects of City services for our customers is the different levels of service they encounter. By supporting and building a solid foundation for electronic government, we have the opportunity to shape the quality of citizen interactions with government in the future.

Left to develop silo services, individual departments and agencies will develop different standards, follow different models of service, and incorporate different designs. To the citizen, this potpourri of windows will be confusing and frustrating.

Yet by providing an enterprise technology platform and standards, individual projects can be streamlined. The enterprise standards and the initial projects will pave the way, so that future projects can realize even greater efficiencies.

## **Personal services**

At its best, government is personal. It helps people when, where and how they need it. Through an optional profile system, regular users of Web services can choose to get personal service. They log in once, and all form fields in City Web services will pre-fill with their information -- saving typing, reducing errors, and streamlining their government service experience.

### **Evaluating and streamlining business processes**

Most job applications submitted to the City are handwritten. In fact, to apply for a job with the City, one must:

1. Find the printed list of job openings.
2. Call HR.
3. An HR staff member will mail a job application to you. It arrives in two or three days.
4. Once the application arrives, you must find a typewriter -- or a blue or black pen.
5. Fill in the application, then mail it back to HR. It arrives in two or three days.
6. HR clerks copy the application and route it to the person handling that job posting, which may take several days. If the applicant wishes to be considered for several open jobs, multiple copies are made and routed.
7. HR staff types basic information into the HRIS computer system.

An online job application eliminates steps 1-4, simplifies step 5, and automates step 6 and 7. In the process, four to eight days are saved. Additionally, the electronic application saves staff time, printing and postage.

### **Case Study**

The paper-based system of ordering business cards required many steps and approvals, and it took up to a month for the cards to arrive.

Using a Web-based form, City employees now get their cards in five to seven days.

## Audiences

- Government to Constituent (G2C): services provided to residents and other individuals  
*Examples: job application, service report, property lookup*
- Government to Business (G2B): services provided primarily to business  
*Examples: procurement (online bidding/bid requests), licensing, online payments or deposits*
- Government to Government (G2G): services provided to other agencies  
*Examples: financial reporting, data sharing*

Most media reports focus on consumer initiatives. However, it has been suggested that the greatest potential for savings lies in the transactions between businesses and suppliers.

## Past initiatives

As a government that has always valued quality service, the City has studied many options to provide service to its customers.

Past efforts have included:

- Consolidated call center
- Consolidated front desks
- Remote City Halls
- Stand-alone kiosks
- Automated telephone systems

Why is Web service different? A glance at the covers of major magazines offers a hint. The Internet has infused our society and changed everyone's business plans. It has been adopted faster than any other technology, including televisions, telephones or VCRs, and its growth is expected to continue. With other service initiatives, it has been necessary to promote the service just to break even. With Web services, customer expectations are outpacing the City's ability to deliver -- and potential cost savings create dramatic return on investment opportunities.

## Other agencies' efforts

The City of Minneapolis is not the first organization to move toward self-service and to use the Web to expand its services. To ensure success, the City must monitor the efforts of other local government agencies. Through this, we can ensure that we share our technologies and tools, integrate our services where appropriate, and share ideas and best practices.

### Using the Internet, you can:

- Look up property information in Dakota County, MN  
<http://www.co.dakota.mn.us/property/>
- Search for licensed contractors in Orange County, FL <http://www.onetgov.net>
- Search public notices in Alaska  
<http://notes.state.ak.us/pn/pubnotic.nsf>
- Buy stamps through the US Postal Service  
<https://www.stampsonline.com>
- File tax forms and pay taxes through the IRS <http://www.irs.gov>
- Order GIS data sets through the State of Georgia <http://www.ganet.org>
- Report a pothole in Virginia Beach, VA  
<http://www.virginia-beach.va.us>
- Apply for a job in Saint Paul, MN  
<http://www.ci.saint-paul.mn.us/jobopenings>

## ***Part Three: Community Access Goals and Objectives***

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### **Enterprise Goals**

#### **Goal One: Foster executive leadership -- "Vision"**

To build an electronic portal to government services requires the active support and involvement of elected officials, department heads and key staff. Success depends on visible, high-level support for the vision of unified electronic government.

##### **Develop executive steering committee**

Determine if the existing executive groups, such as the Technology Steering Committee, are appropriate for providing enterprise leadership.

##### **Determine ownership**

Web service is not just the responsibility of ITS. It integrates business processes built on business needs. Work must be done to establish common understandings about who is primarily responsible for which pieces of the overall system.

##### **Communicate results**

Since a major goal of online service is service improvement, it is critical that successes are tracked and reported.

#### **Goal Two: Integrate efforts enterprise-wide -- "Utility"**

Web services can transform and streamline business, but not if they are left outside of the business. So long as Web services are seen as technology and separate from traditional City services, they will fail to integrate with those services. For example, what happens if a person initiates a permit request on the Web, but wishes to pick up the permit over the counter, or uses the phone to check its status? Integrated services means not just integrating within the Web, but also outside of it through traditional service means.

##### **Case Study**

The State of Washington has launched a state-wide initiative to enhance its Web-based services through central strategies and management.

Using rapid development cycles and central oversight, Access Washington (<http://www.access.wa.gov>) provides more than 70 direct online services, with many more in development.

##### **Coordinate efforts**

The City must coordinate efforts by various departments to ensure consistency and integration.

##### **Examine and revise standards, policies, ordinances**

Web-based services are tools for providing service -- like phones, offices and desks. And like these tools, standards for use across the enterprise are necessary.

##### **Integrate with other service means**

Web service will not entirely replace traditional service means -- so the people at the front desks and on the phones need to be knowledgeable about Web services and able to access and intercept service requests.

### **Evaluate and streamline processes**

Laying Web services over existing processes does not fully leverage the Web. To realize the most potential, businesses need to objectively evaluate their systems, reducing internal inefficiencies.

### **Goal Three: Set budgets and priorities -- "Value"**

Already the City's Web site serves more than a million pages of information a year to citizens, businesses and visitors, making its information a cost-effective service. As new services are proposed, they must be strategically prioritized so that those with the greatest value are given priority. To match the rapid changes in technology, the City needs a process that works in six-month cycles.

#### **Establish funding**

In 2000, \$450,000 was budgeted for Intranet development. That budget allowed the growth of the Intranet with applications like CNAP for property information and the Fire EIS for summary reporting. Policies, processes, standards and interfaces for Web-based development have been outcomes. Work is continuing on applications for Attorneys and Inspectors.

In 2001, for the City to continue Web development, an estimated \$500,000 is necessary. This includes support for public access, creation of a service portal within the existing City Web site, policies and standards work, electronic forms, and some development work on common enterprise applications.

#### **Promote internal efficiencies**

Successful Web projects, like other projects, should demonstrate effectiveness and savings. Web projects will be monitored and savings and efficiencies reported.

### **Goal Four: Build public access to Web services**

The City should work with other local agencies such as the Libraries and NRP to establish a template for public access, including hardware and configurations for low- and high-traffic areas; training programs; maintenance schedules; and suggested usage policies. The City should look for private partners or grant programs to assist with funding, installation, maintenance and promotion of public access sites.

## **Technology Goals**

### **Goal One: Maintain safe, supportable systems**

#### **Upgrade security and firewalls**

This necessary precursor to interactive Web applications was proposed for 2001. ITS is working to see if it can be completed in 2000.

### **Protect personal information**

Government systems that maintain personal information must aggressively protect that information. The City needs to evaluate all projects within existing data practices laws, create a site-wide privacy statement, and enforce privacy standards.

### **Establish reliable, scalable systems**

The current Web architecture is a carefully planned environment that includes load balancing, scalability, regular backups and archiving, and regular maintenance. As the usage of the site grows, this architecture will serve us well. However, the City needs to continue its support for a managed technical environment and arrange 24-hour-a-day technical support.

## **Goal Two: Develop integrated, useful systems**

### **Integrate with Web site content**

The ITS Web Team will integrate new services into the existing Web site, so that they are easily found and that they link to background information and other services. This involves a revision to the information architecture of the site and additional graphic work within the site's style.

### **Set technology, design and usability standards**

ITS has developed Intranet and Internet style guides, which formalize the standards and methodologies used in the Web site. The Web Team will continue to add to these documents to ensure consistency and usability.

### **Enterprise policies and standards will include:**

- User registration/personalization
- Encryption/confidentiality
- Electronic payment methods
- E-form design standards
- E-application design standards

### **Ensure planned, shared development**

The City must work to coordinate enterprise foundation projects, cross-departmental applications such as the property info application (CNAP) and GIS, and departmental initiatives. This will avoid duplicated efforts, confusion for the users, and project bottlenecks.

## **Goal Three: Plan for the future**

### **Evaluate and integrate emerging technology**

As the Internet grows and innovations continue, the City must monitor new initiatives. Current horizon technologies include wireless, handheld computers, Internet appliances, and digital signatures. The City needs to find a balance between diving into unproven technologies and getting left behind.

## ***Part Four: Initiatives***

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### **Enterprise Initiatives (2000)**

#### **Governance**

Determine the mechanisms for evaluating, prioritizing, coordinating and implementing Web service projects.

#### **Policies & Standards (non-technical)**

These include:

- Customer service: standards for responding to e-mail or Web inquiries
- User interface and integration: use of the City's common look and feel, use of standard login
- Transactional and informational: financial standards, record archiving
- Security: maintenance of personal data, privacy policy, interdepartmental information sharing

#### **Evaluate outsourcing options**

The Internet has opened the possibility for a variety of creative outsourcing options.

- Application Service Providers (ASPs) offer many customizable services hosted remotely, (such as credit card transactions) which can ease maintenance and security needs.
- Private organizations are offering comprehensive, out-of-the-box e-government, but may not deliver quality, customer-focused solutions.
- Individual vendors (such as PeopleSoft and AMS) are web-enabling their products, which may not match an integrated, enterprise strategy.
- Local partnership initiatives (such as a proposed League of Cities contract)

The City needs to evaluate these options against ground-up development and internal hosting.

## Pilot Projects (2000)

### Utility billing

Using a Web-based interface, Minneapolis residents will be able to look up their water, sewer and solid waste and recycling bills and pay them using a credit card.

### Job Application

Convert the job application to a Web-oriented one, which allows people to apply online. This is more convenient for applicants and also reduces the data entry backlog into HRIS system.

### E-mail List Services (listserv)

Automated e-mail lists allow the public to sign up to receive notices of interest to them. They are typically self-maintaining in that people opt in or out on their own, without City staff having to maintain the list. Staff simply send e-mail to the list and everyone on the list gets it. For example, the Snow Emergency announcement list is a full-featured listserv. Departments maintaining lists by hand that could immediately benefit from listserv include Clerk, Communications, and Police.

### Early warning system (MNEWS)

Using the City's robust GIS platform, provide web-based reporting tools so that neighborhoods can learn about problem properties quickly and intervene before they get worse.

### Property info

Internally known as CNAP, this popular application will provide self-service for the public to look up housing and inspection information.

### Streaming audio and video

An initiative is under way to stream audio and/or video from the Web site. The project will start with Council meetings but could later include other public meetings and events. In addition, streamed audio/video would reduce dependence on -- or eliminate -- the squawk-boxes currently in use for internal monitoring.

## Future Possibilities (2001 and beyond)

### Licenses (online form submission, fee payment, status tracking, renewals)

- Contractor licenses
- Contractor referrals/complaints
- Business licenses
- Food licenses
- Liquor licenses

### Current Minnesota e-gov services

#### Hennepin County

- Search property information
- Find polling locations
- Look up Housing Court cases and outcomes

#### St. Paul

- Report problems with downed trees, potholes, graffiti, street lights, traffic signals
- Submit job application

#### Metropolitan Council

- Purchase bus pass
- Interactively plan bus trip
- Search for regional parks with interactive maps
- View interactive land use maps

#### State of Minnesota

- View video coverage of Legislative session
- Track bills
- File taxes electronically
- Interactively map crime data
- Create reports on population data

- Pet licenses
- Rental licenses
- Taxi licenses

### **Inspections/Zoning**

- Ask an inspector
- Zoning lookup/Variance request

### **Permits**

- Block party/ special street use permits
- Building permits
- Critical parking permits
- Fire hydrant use permits
- Online plan review
- Parade/race permits

### **Procurement**

- Group purchasing
- Online auctions of stolen/unclaimed goods and surplus City equipment
- Online bid submissions
- Web-based office supplies

### **Financial**

- Payment by credit/debit cards
- Payment by Electronic Funds Transfer (EFT)
- Online budget reporting
- Online budget submission

### **Miscellaneous**

- List of animals available for adoption
- List of currently impounded cars/online payment of towing and impound fees
- Non-emergency crime report (Teleserv)
- Online public comment on environmental assessments, planning reports, proposed budgets, City initiatives
- Rental housing assistance
- Request large item trash pickup

## **Summary**

By building services on its Web site, the City can dramatically improve access to information and services. This will transform the relationship between government and its customers -- empowering them, providing them with better service, and helping them conduct their municipal business.