E-governance
An Introduction
by Megan Crowley, CPPA

If you have used the internet to renew your driver’s license, order a birth certificate, pay taxes, or pay for a license, you have participated in e-government services. These and other online services have become the expected norm for state, county and municipal websites. As Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) advance, e-government systems continue to increase, improve and become mainstream.

ICT advancement also provides both opportunities and public expectations, creating a need to look at new methods of governing - e-governance. Because of ICTs, e-governance systems have potential to not only support public policy, but also assist in the process of creating public policy by actively engaging the public. So what is e-governance and how does it differ from the e-government systems we have in place?

Professor Donald F. Kettl in his book, The Transformation of Governance, defines government as an institutional superstructure that society uses to translate politics into policies and legislation. Kettl describes governance as the outcome of the interaction of government, public service, and citizens throughout the political process, policy development, program design, and service delivery. [1]

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Government</th>
<th>Governance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Superstructure</td>
<td>Interaction of government, public service and citizens</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Policies and legislation</td>
<td>Political process, policy development, program design, service delivery</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

With this definition, government plays a role in governance, along with public service and citizens, with interaction between these entities a critical characteristic of governance.

These same types of differentiators show the contrast between e-government and e-governance.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>E-government</th>
<th>E-governance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Website</td>
<td>Web portal with links to government, public service and citizen forums</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Online code, statutes, regulations</td>
<td>Online discussions of policy topics, feedback for program design and improvement</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

By implementing e-governance systems, we can provide the possibility of closer interactions, government to government, government to public services, government to citizens, and public services to citizens.

Another way to contrast these two concepts is presented in the table below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>E-government characteristics</th>
<th>E-governance characteristics</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Services</td>
<td>Connections</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Efficiencies</td>
<td>Relationships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Back office workflow</td>
<td>Front office interactions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What is accomplished</td>
<td>How and why it is accomplished</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The entity</td>
<td>The connections between entities</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
While important information and services are available as outputs on government websites, the relationships, connections and participation provided via e-governance can provide positive and powerful outcomes for citizens, government, and public services alike.

So how does e-governance show up? Some possible features include:

- The ability for citizens to leave feedback to various government offices
- A subscription based listserv or e-Newsletter that keeps citizens and other agencies informed.
- Online discussion forums or chat rooms to discuss policy issues
- e-Meetings for cross agency / cross governmental participation
- Online citizen surveys or polls for specific issues with published results
- Online citizen satisfaction surveys with published results
- Online decision-making - e-petitions, e-referenda
- Online performance measures with published results

These features get us closer to what David Patton, CPPA Director, talks about in his recent article, *What is Good Governance*. Dr. Patton identified good governance as having the following standards:

- **Participation** - All men and women should have a voice in decision-making, either directly or through legitimate intermediate institutions that represent their interests. Such broad participation is built on freedom of association and speech, as well as capacities to participate constructively.
- **Transparency** - Transparency is built on the free flow of information. Processes, institutions and information are directly accessible to those concerned with them, and enough information is provided to understand and monitor them.
- **Responsiveness** - Institutions and processes try to serve all stakeholders.
- **Consensus orientation** - Good governance mediates differing interests to reach a broad consensus on what is in the best interests of the group and, where possible, on policies and procedures.
- **Equity** - All men and women have opportunities to improve or maintain their well-being.
- **Effectiveness and efficiency** - Processes and institutions produce results that meet needs while making the best use of resources.
- **Accountability** - Decision-makers in government, the private sector and civil society organizations are accountable to the public, as well as to institutional stakeholders. This accountability differs depending on the organization and whether the decision is internal or external to an organization. [ii]

Not only can ICTs assist in achieving these standards, but e-governance implementation plans should apply these same standards, particularly transparency, which can provide a method of managing the expectations of a participating public.

But by engaging the public in policy making, are we diminishing the representative relationship? No, say Stephen Coleman and John Gotse in their paper *Bowling Together: Online Public Engagement in Policy Deliberation*. The authors suggest that this practice strengthens the relationship.

ICTs provide new opportunities to connect citizens to their representatives, resulting in a less remote system of democratic governance. The alternative to engaging the public will not be an unengaged public, but a public with its own agenda and an understandable hostility to decision-making processes which appear to ignore them. By bringing citizens into the loop of governance, opportunities for mutual learning occur; representatives can tap into the experiences and expertise of the public and citizens can come to understand the complexities and dilemmas of policy making. [iii]

---


bowlingtogether.net

Published by Center for Public Policy & Administration.
Copyright © 2008 The University of Utah. All rights reserved.
The Center for Public Policy & Administration offers research, education and services to public and nonprofit organizations that will strengthen administration, leadership and public policy making.

Powered by IMN