

***The New York State
Local Government Information Technology
Directors Association***

**Strategic Planning Session Report
October 5-6, 2010**

***Conducted by the
Center for Technology in Government,
University at Albany/SUNY***

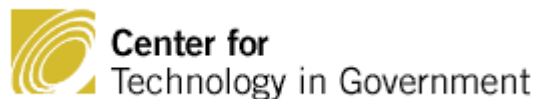


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Introduction

In fall of 2010, the New York State Local Government IT Directors Association (NYSLGITDA) asked the Center for Technology in Government (CTG) at the University at Albany to facilitate a workshop that would build on a 2008 strategic planning session.¹ As part of their Fall 2010 Conference, the Board came together on October 5-6, 2010 in Syracuse, NY for two half-day discussions that focused on the Association's goals, priorities, and opportunities over the next three years. The following report provides a brief history of the Association and a summary of the activities and outcomes from the workshop.

History of NYSLGITDA

The NYSLGITDA is a membership-based organization "dedicated to the coordination and improvement of information technology in all types of government in New York State."² Although the Association wasn't formally established as a nonprofit 501(c)(6) until 1996, early activities that led to its creation began in the mid-1980s.³ Membership is open to a wide range of municipalities, but the Association's primary audience is at the county level. At present, the Association serves more than 70 counties and municipalities. However, its scope of influence ranges from cities and towns to the state. The Association achieves this wide range of influence through semi-annual conferences, interactive communication methods (especially their member listserv), and representation on state-level advisory boards and councils.

The NYSLGITDA leadership consists of its Officers and the Board of Directors. All positions are elected and volunteer. Below is a current list of the 2010 NYSLGITDA leadership:

Officers

- President: Dale Nieswiadomy, Livingston County
- Vice President: Ken Beam, Onondaga County
- Treasurer: James Brady, Chemung County
- Secretary: David Cucciarre, Delaware County
- Past President: Ed Hemminger, Ontario County



Board of Directors

- Rick Cobello, Schenectady County
- Stanley France, Schoharie County
- Kim McKinney, Broome County
- Greg Potter, Tompkins County
- Karen Pratt, Washington County
- Sylvia Wohlfahrt, Ulster County
- Steve Zimmer, Genesee County



The Board takes on a wide range of operational tasks for the Association, the largest of which is the organization of the semi-annual conferences held each spring and fall.

Strategic Planning Approach

In 2008, the Board (with direction from CTG) created a five-year strategic plan for 2008 to 2013. The 2010 conversation focused on evaluating that plan and determining how to direct the Association's resources to achieve its high priority goals. As a volunteer organization, with limited time resources from its leadership, the Association needs to be selective about its activities in order to maximize its impact.

During the 2010 workshop, the Board assessed the strategic plan they put forward in 2008, confirmed their key priorities, and developed action plans for carrying them out.

¹ For the results of the 2008 strategic planning session, see http://www.nyslgitda.org/Strategic%20Planning%20Session%20Report%202012-4-08_FINAL.pdf.

² http://www.nyslgitda.org/about_us.htm

³ <http://www.nyslgitda.org/history.htm>

The workshop discussions focused on reviewing and refining the following two areas:

- Association goals (as stated on the website) and
- goals, priorities, and tasks set forth at the 2008 strategic planning session.

Decisions were made about two key concerns:

- conference viability and future formats and
- top priorities and work plan assignments for 2010-2013.

Two CTG staff members, Meghan Cook and Anna Raup-Kounovsky, facilitated both days using a variety of techniques including standard elicitation, clustering, and voting on priorities. The following sections of the report are summaries of the activities, conversations, and outcomes of the strategic planning sessions.

Review and Refinement of the Association's Goals

The workshop began with a review of the Association's seven stated goals, focusing on whether those goals articulate what the Association currently does and what its leaders would like to accomplish in the future.

Below are the seven goals that have guided the Association since it was founded:

1. Assist local governments in their use of information technology.
2. Promote sound general principles for computer system development and use.
3. Maintain an information file concerning local government in the State of New York and to make that information available to members.
4. Advise all government agencies and officials concerning the use of information technology at all levels of local government.
5. Maintain information concerning vendors of equipment, supplies and services, and to make that material readily available to members.
6. Encourage, facilitate, and monitor the sharing of computer technology and techniques among its members.
7. Provide a continuing source of training for members and local government officials.

The Association's leadership agreed that the goals could be refined to better reflect the NYSLGITDA's current activities and priorities. In a plenary discussion, they suggested modifications and consolidations that resulted in four goal statements:

1. Promote, encourage, and facilitate information sharing among association members through face to face and electronic mediums.
2. Support statewide information sharing by maintaining an information repository of high value documents related to the use of information technology in NYS county and local governments.
3. Advise and promote information sharing with state entities (agencies and non-profit organizations) about the use and impact of IT in NYS county and local governments.
4. Maintain and make readily available appropriate vendor information including contact details, equipment, supplies, and services.

How Are We Doing In Meeting Those Goals?

These four goal statements do not alter the organization's core mission, but present a refined sense of the Association. Once the goals were consolidated, Board members were asked to assess the current and desired frequency of activities used to achieve each goal. More specifically, Board members were asked to rank how often current and desired Association activities occur on a scale of "Never" to "All the Time." This exercise helped members gauge where the Association is today and where it should be in meeting each of their four goal statements. The following are the results from this exercise:

Results for Goal # 1: Promote, encourage, and facilitate information sharing among Association members through face to face and electronic mediums.

- The Board members uniformly believe that the Association's activities meet this goal almost all of the time. Ideally, the Board members would like to facilitate information sharing on a more frequent basis, but they still felt they are currently meeting this goal.

Results for Goal # 2: Support statewide information sharing by maintaining an information repository of high value documents related to the use of information technology in NYS county and local governments.

- The Board members agreed that they have not been able to adequately meet this goal through their current activities. Activities to meet this goal will require more time, resources, and attention in the future to achieve the desired state. However, many of the Board members said initial steps toward achieving this goal are underway with the evolution of the listserv and some experimentation with Google Groups.

Results for Goal # 3: Advise and promote information sharing with state entities (agencies and non-profit organizations) about the use and impact of IT in NYS county and local governments.

- The Board members agreed that although state/local information sharing is happening on an ongoing basis, it does not occur as frequently as they would like in an ideal state. In order to meet their desired state, there needs to be a greater investment of time and resources in order to successfully meet this goal. They expressed a large gap between what they currently do and what they want to do in the future.

Results for Goal # 4: Maintain and make readily available appropriate vendor information including contact details, equipment, supplies, and services.

- The Board members were in agreement that the current state of this goal is the same as the desired state. They plan to continue using the same strategies, since the status quo is acceptable in this particular case.

The discussions from this gap analysis of the Association's goals helped to shape the remainder of the agenda for the strategic planning session. Members could see that focusing their discussion on activities and mechanisms to meet goals 2 and 3 was an appropriate use of their time.

Discussion and Priority Setting for Major Initiatives (2010-2013)

While the previous discussion led the Board to focus on goals 2 and 3, they also revisited the strategic plan set forth during the 2008 strategic planning session. Through a plenary discussion, they talked about the evolution of the Association since the goals were originally created and how their priorities have shifted.

The 2008 strategic planning session yielded eight priorities; from that list, the group voted on their top three priorities, listed below:

1. Increase involvement of existing members.
2. Continue influence on and relationships with state agencies.
3. Increase the use of technology resources.

While revisiting the above priorities during the 2010 session, Board members were asked to consider and discuss the following questions:

- Should you still pursue these three priorities?
- What other priorities would you add?
- Would you take any out? Why?

There was a discussion of these questions in relationship to all eight priorities before the group determined that they had four key priorities for 2010-2013. Many were the same as in 2008, but some new ideas were introduced. The priorities that received the highest number of votes include the following:

1. Continue to build relationships, promote information sharing, and offer advice to state agencies.
2. Continue and promote information sharing among all members.
3. Remain fiscally sound.
4. Increase involvement from the entire Association membership.

There were two additional priorities that received low or no votes. Those priorities were not excluded from the Board's future activities, but they were excluded from further discussion so that the Board members

could focus on the high priority items. Although these items were not discussed in detail, they remain areas for future exploration.

- Investigate the potential for sharing or shared services.
- Increasing new membership.

After voting, the Board spent time further exploring the top four priorities in greater detail by identifying specific actions and opportunities the Association could take, describing the importance of each, and then making assignments to carry them out. The following sections provide some details about the discussion and assignments within each of the four priorities.

1. Continue to build relationships, promote information sharing, and offer advice to NYS agencies.

As one of the leading goals of the Association, members agreed that they had made great strides in this priority already. However, this goal remains important and deserves continued focus over the next several years.

The Board recognizes that there are two main groups with whom they would like to continue to develop relationships: the NYS Office of the CIO and the state agencies that interact with county and local governments. With both of these groups, NYSLGITDA would like to continue to be seen as resource for information about local government issues and to take advantage of opportunities to provide input on the challenges and potential impacts of state-local systems.

When discussing what it looks like to have influence and be seen as resource, the Board described a set of actions that need to take place:

- Sit on committees for specific agencies or workgroups.
- Take phone calls from individuals within state government to discuss areas of potential impact.
- Become involved in the development of the CIO Academy.
- Become more involved with NYS Forum events.
- Focus on projects that impact your county and use that opportunity to change policies and practices at the state level.
- Offer to be a beta site when there is a large technology change coming.
- Promote a more meaningful exchange between state and local CIOs at the Spring NYSLGITDA Conference.

There are clear benefits to taking part in state committees and boards, which include the following:

- Visibility of the Association and enhancements to its credibility.
- Presence during conversations about projects that have potential impact on local operations.
- Relationship building with individuals.
- Increased opportunities to provide the local perspective on proposed changes.
- Increased opportunities to change the course of an initiative in order to mitigate negative impacts and produce positive outcomes.

There are several Board and Association members currently serving on committees:

- CIO Council Leadership Committee – Kim McKinney
- CIO Council Open Government, Communication, and Collaboration Committee – Sylvia Wohlfart, Dale Nieswiadomy, Kim McKinney, and Marguerite Beirne
- CIO Academy – Karen Pratt
- NYS Forum Executive Board – Dale Nieswiadomy (Association president is always a member)
- NYS Forum Small/Medium/Local Government Committee – Karen Pratt
- Office of Real Property Services Governance – Dale Nieswiadomy, Greg Potter
- NYS Broadband Council – Ed Hemminger

When asked if there continues to be specific state agencies that are the main focus for relationship building, the Board identified the following clusters of agencies. This list is identical to the one generated in 2008:

- Criminal Justice (Division of Criminal Justice Services, State Police, Integrated Justice Advisory Board, Department of Correctional Services, etc.)
- Health (numerous offices within the Department of Health)
- Social Services (Office of Children and Family Services, Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance)
- Tax and Finance (the Office of Real Property Services is now included in this agency)

There was also a discussion about barriers to participating at the state level. Many members cannot justify travel to Albany, especially since most local governments face increased budget constraints. Even members who regularly participated in state committees and events are finding it more difficult to obtain travel approval. The financial barriers to travel can restrict face to face participation, which is very important for building relationships. In many cases, county CIOs need to demonstrate direct return on investment to the county (not just the Association) for the travel they undertake. The Association has stepped in to cover some travel expenses, but cannot always do so. This concern will continue to be a discussion point in the future.

Finally, the conversation turned to the fact that New York State will elect a new Governor in the coming months. To prepare for that transition, Board members agreed that it would be in their best interest to develop a position piece that describes the Association and how it plays a role in the state's IT community. More specifically, this document could outline several key features of the Association:

- The overall interests and goals of the Association.
- What the Association can offer an incoming administration, including feedback on intergovernmental issues and providing perspective about how state projects impact local governments.
- Advantages of partnering with the Association and individual counties.
- Highlight the important committees and groups that members of the Association and its Board currently serve on.

Outcome/Assignment. Developing a position piece could serve as a tool to advocate for the Association with multiple audiences, not just the incoming administration. Ken Beam, Kim McKinney, and Ed Hemminger all agreed to work on this document.

2. Continue to promote information sharing among all members.

Information sharing among members is primarily done in two ways: 1) through the listserv and 2) at the conferences. A very high percentage of members already use these two mechanisms regularly. The focus of this conversation was not to increase the involvement of members, but rather to make improvements and enhancements to the tools and approaches already in use. The suggested methods for making those enhancements are detailed below.

A. Enhancing the Listserv and Introducing a New Central Repository Solution

In the 2008 strategic planning session, this topic area was called "evolution of the listserv" and was identified as a high priority. Following the 2008 session, Board members conducted best practices research to see what technical advances were available for organizations looking to have more functionality in their listservs. Those conducting this research found that members are less likely to participate in a discussion if it is held outside of email or would require them to log-in to an external site. If these online conversations remain part of their email, members will continue to engage with one another. But the Association's traditional listserv has no archiving or search capabilities and no way to store and index documents. The Board discussed these limitations and was able to determine some next steps for continued research and experimentation with new applications. The following is a listing of the items that were discussed during this conversation.

Central Repository of Documents

- Google Docs is a possible solution for a central repository of documents. The Association needs a place to store documents such as RFPs that members are constantly sending to each other as examples.
- The Board would want document management features and notification about new posts to the repository.
- All members would be encouraged to share documents in the repository, but would probably need a short tutorial about how to use it.

- The repository could be set up and tested with a small group of people in a pilot phase and then shared with the full membership after the Spring 2011 Conference.

Listserv

- Google Groups is another forum the Association could use in place of the listserv, but it requires everyone to create a Google account and login to a separate location to access the discussion. Based on past experience, this form of communication does not work for the Association; members tend not to use something that requires an extra step in the process.
- The Board members agreed that they need to continue investigating an alternative to their current listserv. Not only do they need to identify a solution with additional functionalities, but they also need to locate an alternative site for the listserv, which is currently housed at Schoharie County.

Outcome/Assignment. The Board members agreed to continue researching solutions that provide archiving and search functionality without having to move to a site with a separate log-in. Leading this effort are Dale Nieswiadomy, Greg Potter, and Rick Cobello.

B. Enhancing the Conferences

The conferences are the best place for members to continue to build relationships and share information with each other. In addition, the Spring Conference offers the opportunity to network with peers from state agencies. Over the past several years the format of the conference has changed based on feedback from the members. There is a need to balance unstructured time for networking with requests for presentations about certain projects or topics. This constant tension will continue to make the process of developing an agenda a difficult one. Some ideas to add more networking time include providing additional unstructured social time to allow essential relationship building to take place and going without hired entertainment to encourage greater conversation among members, vendors, and other guests.

Spring 2011 Conference: A More Meaningful Exchange between State and Local CIOs

In the past the Spring Conference has served as a venue for the CIO Council quarterly meeting. The feedback from Association members has been that this joint meeting has the potential to yield more value than it has so far. For the Spring 2011 Conference, there is a request to modify the format of the meeting to focus less on reports and more on information sharing among the attendees. In order to make sure that the session has the best results, the Board was asked to describe the characteristics and outcomes of a meaningful exchange. Their responses include a wide range of interactions:

- Identification and discussion of common concerns and interests.
- Learn about the perspectives of other individuals.
- Develop an understanding of who performs what functions so that individuals know who to call in the future.
- Discuss how state and local needs and concerns are different from one another.
- Share solutions that work and those that do not work in each context.
- Networking and interaction among state and local CIOs.
- Identify areas for joint problem solving.
- Learn more about a specific topic.
- Understand the unique circumstances of each agency and county.
- Provide and receive input about intergovernmental projects during their development.

Board members agreed that in order to achieve the desired results, they need to carefully craft the logistics and overall format of the session. They developed a specific set of recommendations for the meeting format and content:

- All state CIOs will be invited to join the group for lunch before the meeting.
- The joint meeting will take place from 1 pm – 4 pm.
- The joint meeting will have a brief opening presentation, possibly from someone in the new administration.
- The meeting will provide a venue for discussions around common topics.
- Expected attendance for this meeting is about 110 people
- Possible topics include content management, e-discovery, Web 2.0 and social media, using the cloud, and shared services.

Outcome/Assignment - For the Spring 2011 Conference, CTG will assist in the development of the facilitation plan and agenda for the joint meeting in order to ensure three outcomes: the topics meet the needs of state and local representatives, everyone has the opportunity to speak, and there are action items and next steps at the end of the session. CTG will present alternative options for this event to Dale Nieswiadomy.

C. New Information Sharing Networks

One suggestion from the Board was that the Association could take a more proactive approach to information sharing across technical staff within the counties. Not all county CIOs bring their technical staff to the conference; finding a way to introduce these staff members to their colleagues around the state could help them to build a wider community of practice for their field. Board members stated that if they were to implement this strategy, these communities or practice would focus on telecommunications and networks, since the application developers would probably have little in common across counties.

Following the same pattern that the county CIOs use, these technical people could share information with each other via a listserv or face-to-face at a conference. Two options emerged for facilitating this interaction: a technical subgroup of the listserv or a separate listserv for the technical staff to use.

Outcome/Assignment. Although the Board members thought these communities of practice are a good idea, they did not want to take on any new activities that require investments in capabilities until other priorities are complete (such as evaluating the listserv).

3. Remain fiscally sound.

Through good management and a strong sense of responsibility, the Association has been able to remain fiscally sound throughout its history. However, given the current financial climate, there are some concerns about remaining that way. The Association's major source of revenue is the semi-annual conference. The Board members identified a bottom-line dollar amount they need to have in cash reserves as they move forward with each conference. Although they are not at that monetary threshold, they want to continually assess the incoming support and registrations for each conference.

Since the conferences are the two best ways for the Association to solidify and stabilize its financial resources, they discussed what every member can do in order to make sure the finances are accurate and there is a substantial return on investment.

Outcome/Assignment. Every member should understand the importance of the conferences for the financial stability of the Association. The Board made several short recommendations:

- Make sure all counties are reporting and following up with accurate numbers for rooms and meals for each participant. Even just one unused room can increase the cost of the conference.
- Encourage every Association member to forward the preliminary conference invitation to all the vendors they currently work with.
- Put forth that every member should consider reaching out to longstanding and cold calling vendors with information about the benefits of attending the conference

4. Increase involvement from the entire Association membership.

The Board members agreed that the best way to maintain the Association's leadership was to encourage and mentor new members of the leadership team. Beyond promoting more active engagement with its

members, soliciting new volunteers for the Association ensures continuity of leadership when the current Board members leave those roles. The Board identified several opportunities to increase involvement. These include opportunities to support the internal operations of the Association and to represent the Association at the state level.

Specifically, the Board would like to recruit members for the following activities:

- Serving on state committees and boards.
- Planning and implementing the two conferences; specifically, the upcoming Spring 2011 Conference.
- Reaching out to new CIOs to encourage them to participate in the Association.
- Developing specific workgroups for targeted topics (development of the Association's position document for the new administration, the evolution of the NYSLGITDA listserv, and establishing the central repository for documents).
- Attending the NYS CIO Academy.
- Participating in the vendor solicitation and follow up team.
- Taking the lead in updating the Association's website language.

This set of opportunities for engagement is broad enough so that members with varying degrees of knowledge about the Association could engage and become more active.

Outcome/Assignment. Several Board members will make a brief presentation to the membership during the Fall 2010 conference. The presentation will focus on the results of the strategic planning session and ask the Association members to help in carrying out the deliverables. The goal is for the Board to describe what they are doing toward achieving the Association's goals in hopes that more people will want to participate. If this strategy does not yield high involvement, then the Board may reach out to specific members to encourage participation.

Review of Goal Assignments

1. Continue to build relationships, promote information sharing, and offer advice to NYS agencies.

- Encourage other members to serve on state committees and boards.
- Develop a position piece that describes the importance and value of the Association. Those taking the lead on this priority are Ken Beam, Kim McKinney, and Ed Hemminger.

2. Continue to promote information sharing among all members.

- The Board will continue research on a listserv solution that provides archiving and search functionalities without having to move to a separate site that requires a log-in. Leading this effort are Dale Nieswiadomy, Greg Potter, and Rick Cobello.
- Host a joint information sharing session at the Spring 2011 Conference in Saratoga Springs with state and local CIOs. CTG will assist in the development of the facilitation plan and agenda for the event in order to ensure that the topics meet everyone's expectations, all participants have the opportunity to speak, and that there are action items and next steps at the end of the session.

3. Remain fiscally sound.

- Make sure that every member understands the importance of the conferences for the financial stability of the Association. The Board will encourage members to do the following:
 - Make sure all reporting for rooms and meals is as accurate as possible.
 - Forward the preliminary invite for conferences to all the vendors they currently work with.
 - Reach out to longstanding vendors and those making cold calls to CIOs with information about the benefits of supporting the conference.

4. Increasing involvement from the entire Association membership.

- Several Board members will make a brief presentation to the membership during the Fall 2010 conference. The presentation will focus on the results of the strategic planning session and asking the

Association members to help carry out the deliverables. The goal is for the Board to describe what they are doing toward achieving the Association's goals in hopes that more people will want to participate. If this strategy does not yield high involvement, then the Board may reach out to specific members to encourage participation.