

# WHAT'S ON-LINE?

## e-GOV IN SAN LUIS OBISPO COUNTY

This report describes the current state of e-Gov services in San Luis Obispo (SLO) County. It does not address the larger subject of information technology (IT) in the County.

### INTRODUCTION

*What is e-Gov (or e-Government)?*

Also described as digital government, on-line government or connected government, e-Gov is communication and interaction through electronic media between government and the public, between government and businesses, and among government agencies.

*Distinction between Internet and Intranet*

To fully grasp the meaning and impact of e-Gov services, it is important to understand the distinction between internet and intranet. The **internet** refers to universal access to information through the World Wide Web, or via electronic media. **Intranet** refers to an electronic media network controlled by an organization, such as a government entity or a private company, for internal use only.

In this report, the **internet** refers to access to information and communication **between** government and its clients, e.g., individuals and businesses, via electronic media. The **intranet** refers to access to information and interaction through electronic media internal to government agencies, i.e., **within** the government only.

Examples of e-Gov today, both **internet** and **intranet**, include:

- The public may have access to information about government services, obtain government forms and even communicate with government employees via the **internet**

- Businesses may obtain information, complete applications and make payments to the government via the **internet**
- Employees of government agencies, such as the County, may share information through their own internal network, the **intranet**

### *Expected Benefits of e-Gov*

Expected benefits of e-government include greater efficiency and improved services, better and easier accessibility to public services and greater transparency. Examples of ways in which e-Gov has transformed the public's interaction with county government include:

- County property assessment and tax information accessible on-line
- County taxes and some fees payable on-line
- County Board of Supervisors agendas and meeting minutes accessible on-line
- Information about spending under the federal American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 at the SLO County level available on-line

The County is exploring delivery of additional e-Gov services and benefits in the future.

## **ORIGIN**

This investigation was initiated by the Grand Jury.

## **METHOD/PROCEDURE**

The Grand Jury obtained information for this report from interviews with four County staff, the Director and Deputy Director, IT, of the County General Services Agency, and the current and former chairpersons of the e-Gov Community of Interest. The Grand Jury also reviewed documents provided by County staff.

## NARRATIVE

The County engaged the Gartner Group, a nationally known Information Technology (IT) consultancy, to provide a road map for the development of its information technology services. The Gartner Group delivered an IT Strategic Plan in 2002 to help the County develop a county-wide IT strategy, including an e-Gov component. With the IT Strategic Plan in hand, the County recruited IT professionals with both government and private sector experience, reorganized the IT structure in the County and began to implement the IT strategic plan, including its e-Gov component.

In SLO County, the IT department is housed within the General Services Agency (GSA), unlike many other counties where IT is a separate department. The management structure of the GSA includes among its group of deputy directors a Deputy Director, IT, thereby raising the visibility of IT within the GSA.

The key driver in implementing e-Gov in the County has been the e-Gov Community of Interest (COI). The e-Gov COI is an advisory body and subordinate to the IT Executive Steering Committee, which is the main IT governance body in the County and chaired by the County Administrative Officer (see Attachment). The e-Gov COI, comprised of IT volunteers from various County agencies, has led the e-Gov effort and actually manages the County website content for most departments.

The County has two significant accomplishments in the area of e-Gov:

- Purchase and implementation of a content management system to manage the County website content
- Purchase and implementation of a single vendor e-Payments system for all County vendors

However, much remains to be done to achieve the ultimate goal of making County services available to the public 24/7 and through “one-stop shopping.” The ultimate goal is to allow a citizen to receive several services on-line and make one payment for all services provided.

“One-stop shopping” would include being able to launch a business by obtaining all necessary information and paying all necessary fees through one site, rather than multiple sites.

Currently, the e-Gov COI is investigating how the County can adopt social media, e.g., Facebook, Twitter and YouTube, to communicate with the public. The County hopes to extend its reach to younger County citizens through expanding its use of social media, given the rapid spread of social media use among the young.

To date, the County has focused the e-Gov effort on external clients, i.e., the public, and it has significant achievements to its credit. At the same time, the County has paid relatively little attention to its internal clients, i.e., County agencies. There is a large body of County agency information that could be uploaded to the County’s intranet for all County agency employees to access, e.g., department policies and procedures. If this were done, County employee searches for information at the county level would be faster and more efficient. County officials recognize that the County’s intranet has been underutilized and potential efficiencies are not being realized.

However, this is a classic “chicken and egg” scenario. County employees do not extensively use the intranet because there is relatively little useful information posted thereon. On the other hand, relatively little useful information is posted on the intranet because it is not heavily used by County employees. If senior county officials were to champion the intranet, in particular by mandating the uploading of much more information, there would be greater County employee accessibility to information via the intranet and intranet usage would increase.

The County appears to have no mechanism for obtaining input from its external clients about its delivery of e-Gov services. The County does not appear to make regular use of surveys, focus or advisory groups to obtain input or provide feedback to the County about its e-Gov services. The current survey on the County’s website requesting feedback does not appear to be part of an established, regular feedback program. At the same time, there is little evidence that the County has surveyed County employees for suggestions as to how the County could make better use of its intranet system.

## CONCLUSION

In summary, the Grand Jury learned that SLO County government has committed, experienced professionals in place to plan, implement and oversee new e-Gov offerings to county citizens and businesses now and into the future. In 2002, SLO County government had the foresight to commission the Gartner Group to develop an IT Strategic Plan for the County. Since then, the County has been implementing the plan and has made significant strides in developing and delivering e-Gov offerings to the citizens and businesses of the County. More information and services are available on-line than ever before and the amount is growing.

Much remains to be done, however, in both the internet and intranet arenas. Although the County has made progress in making information available and delivering e-Gov services to the public via the internet, the County does not appear to have a regular mechanism for obtaining feedback from external users. Understandably, the focus to date has been on developing and delivering e-Gov services; however, there has been much less emphasis on obtaining potentially valuable feedback from public users. Public user feedback would have value not only for assessing current e-Gov services, but also in helping to identify future e-Gov services.

Regarding the County intranet, comparatively little has been done. Some information, indeed, has been uploaded to the intranet and is used by County employees. However, far more information could be uploaded, which means that the capabilities of the County intranet are underutilized and potential benefits are delayed. In addition, the County appears to have made little effort to survey County employees about their views and suggestions as to how the County intranet could be better utilized.

## **FINDINGS**

1. SLO County has implemented and continues to develop and implement e-Gov services for its citizens.
2. County government has focused primarily on external clients/customers in its e-Gov efforts
3. County government has not placed similar focus on its own, currently underutilized, intranet.
4. County government has not developed and implemented a regular, formal method of obtaining feedback from the citizens of SLO County on its e-Gov services, both current and potential.
5. The County has not formally surveyed its staff on how it might improve utilization of its intranet.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

1. SLO County should consider establishing an e-Gov advisory group consisting of local public users of e-Gov services, ideally a cross-section of business people and private citizens.
2. SLO County should establish a focus group approach to obtaining feedback from public users of e-Gov services.
3. SLO County should conduct an initial survey of County staff on how it might improve utilization of the County intranet, in order to establish a baseline. Thereafter, it should conduct periodic surveys to track progress and solicit ideas for further improvements.
4. SLO County should establish an internal task force targeted at improving the County's intranet, perhaps spearheaded by the e-Gov COI.

## REQUIRED RESPONSES

**The General Services Agency of San Luis Obispo County** is required to respond to Findings 1 - 5 and Recommendations 1 - 4. The responses shall be submitted to the Presiding Judge of the San Luis Obispo Superior Court by **July 18, 2011**. Please provide a paper copy and an electronic version of all responses to the Grand Jury, as well.

**The Board of Supervisors of San Luis Obispo County** is required to respond to Findings 1 - 5 and Recommendations 1 - 4. The responses shall be submitted to the Presiding Judge of the San Luis Obispo Superior Court by **August 17, 2011**. Please provide a paper copy and an electronic version of all responses to the Grand Jury, as well.

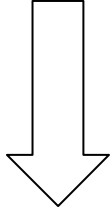
The mailing addresses for delivery are:

<b>Presiding Judge</b>	<b>Grand Jury</b>
Presiding Judge Charles S. Crandall Superior Court of California 1050 Monterey Street San Luis Obispo, CA 93408	San Luis Obispo County Grand Jury P.O. Box 4910 San Luis Obispo, CA 93402

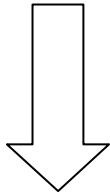
The email address for the Grand Jury is: [GrandJury@co.slo.ca.us](mailto:GrandJury@co.slo.ca.us)

**ATTACHMENT**

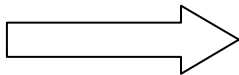
**General Services Administration,  
Director**



**General Services Administration,  
Deputy Director, IT**



**Information Technology Executive  
Steering Committee (ITESC)\***



**e-Gov Community of  
Interest (COI)**

\*This committee is chaired by the Chief Administrative Officer of SLO County