

Digital Government Community-Building and Outreach

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Background: Digital Government research is not what it used to be.

In fewer than 10 years, this relatively new field has expanded from a few exploratory studies on e-government technology and practice into a broad, diverse community of disciplines and sub-disciplines that unify the fields of computer research, social sciences, government IT and public policy.

Unlike pure IT science or policy study disciplines, DG relies for its challenges and vitality not only on direct collaborations with government agencies to address questions of the way government can and should interact with stakeholder citizens, but also on cross-pollination among dramatically disparate academic disciplines. Scholars anchored by expertise in biodiversity, organizational behavior, systems integration, criminal justice, artificial intelligence and more work side-by-side on DG projects with government communities including environmental protection, law enforcement, urban planning, statistics, education, health, transportation and resource management.

Without a common ground on which to explore research agendas, forge relationships and share information, the vibrant, multidisciplinary community could suffer a Babel-sized disconnect, pursuing individual agendas and losing sight of its ultimate goals.

So, the Digital Government Research Center has been working with the National Science Foundation's Digital Government program managers to provide DG researchers a communal foundation from which to grow -- together -- into a full-fledged discipline with common purpose.

Action:

With a grant from the NSF, the DGRC convened the first Digital Government workshop four years ago, establishing an annual meeting where principal investigators and government agency representatives could share their research, discuss common issues and begin defining the sub-disciplines of DG research.

In early 2002, the Digital Government Research Center obtained a grant that enabled it to assume the additional responsibility for handling all outreach and community-building efforts for the Digital Government Research Program.

Toolset construction, publications and community/public outreach:

The first order of business was rebuilding the program's website, DigitalGovernment.org. The DGRC completely overhauled the site's information architecture and design, seeking to build in tools and content that could help the community speak both as individuals to each other, and as a whole to potential government partners and members of the press and the public who had never heard of Digital Government research.

After consulting with a handful of key program participants, the DGRC

- rebuilt the database of projects, researchers and institutions, adding
 - search functionality to allow search of all profiles by name, institution, project title, keyword, technology and government domain
 - new, user-editable fields enabling researchers to customize their profiles with photographs, URLs, recent accomplishments and requests for collaboration or assistance from the community;
- added a calendar of events;
- established dgOnline, the monthly newsletter of Digital Government Research;
- incorporated news content on the home page, communicating a vital, busy public image for the program and making researchers and government partners aware of successful projects;
- integrated the a search engine, giving users the ability to search all government affiliate sites as well as DigitalGovernment.org; and
- established user forums;

Last fall, DGRC collaborated with the Bureau of Labor Statistics on a usability study of the web site, then added some enhancements and improved functionality.

The DGRC has also been working to broaden public awareness of Digital Government research by

- encouraging dissemination of dgOnline;
- publishing and distributing the multimedia final report and proceedings of the annual conference;
- making news organizations aware of DG projects;
- publishing a new Case Studies brochure for external distribution;
- making direct contacts with federal, state, county and urban CTOs who might be potential Digital Government collaborators and funders of DG research; and
- increasing contacts with the European community.

Results:

- Attendance at the conference and proposal submissions are steadily increasing;
- DigitalGovernment.org is the second-ranked site in Google results for the search term "digital government;"
- Traffic on DigitalGovernment.org has approximately tripled;
- More than 700 people now subscribe to the dgOnline newsletter; and
- DG research has been covered by the *Los Angeles Times*, *Boston Globe*, *New York Times*, and *IEEE Spectrum* online.