

Electronic Government at the American Grassroots Project Highlights

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Recent nationwide surveys of local governments in the United States have found that around 90 percent of city and county governments have adopted official sites on the World Wide Web through which they deliver governmental information and services. However, most sites are relatively new (two-thirds of the web sites are seven years old or less), suggesting that most local governments are newcomers to the deployment electronic government. In addition, studies of local government web contents have found that most sites are fairly basic, offering mostly information and access to a few services. Relatively few cities and counties engage in electronic transactions or offer other electronic services through their web sites and fewer still are true portals. Instead, most web sites are passive, information providing instruments. These data indicate that few local governments have extensive digital government installations. Finally, these and other studies have found that local governments report the existence of several barriers to the adoption of digital government.

I began this research to examine further and in greater detail the extent and nature of barriers to local government adoption of electronic government and to explore the strategies and tactics that city and county governments have successfully employed to overcome these barriers and adopt digital government. In addition, I examined questions like why local governments adopted e-government in the first place, their initial expectation for it, its initial impacts, the management and financing of e-government and local governments' future plans for e-government. Electronic government in this research is defined as the electronic provision of governmental information and services 24 hours per day, seven days per week.

I employed the focus group as the qualitative data collection methodology employed for this research. More specifically, I organized and conducted focus groups consisting of approximately Chief Information Officers (CIOs) or their equivalents and/or top policy and administrative officials from approximately 10 city and county governments each from four regions of the U.S. (Northeast; North Central; South; and West). The focus group is a well known and widely used method of qualitative data collection in several fields of the social sciences including education, communication, marketing, political science, public health and sociology.

This research is significant for several reasons. First, to date there has been no research of this kind in the area of digital government. Second, findings from this will be highly useful to government policy-makers and administrators at all levels as they face decisions regarding the adoption of digital government. Third, the findings of this research will be valuable to scholars who investigate issues relating to information technology in governmental organizations and who teach the next generation of public managers and IT specialists in government. Fourth, these findings will extend an important scholarly literature (that is now three decades old) regarding

the adoption, uses, management and effects of information management and information technology in governmental organizations.

To date, I have completed the focus groups, edited and coded the the focus data, and have written two papers for presentations at conferences. I have also developed a book proposal. Additional anticipated produces include: a final project report; an executive summary/press release of the report; papers for submission to scholarly journals; and shorter pieces aimed at lay audiences for publication in practitioner and professional magazines. I will disseminate many of these pieces thorough my web site at UMBC.

Finally, in the Spring of 2004, I will conduct mini-case studies of several of the most successful e-government web sites from among the cities and counties in the focus groups. These will be highlighted in the final project report and in other written works

This research was conducted within the Maryland Institute for Policy Analysis and Research (MIPAR) of the University of Maryland Baltimore County (UMBC). Established in 1982 on the UMBC campus, the MIPAR serves as the principal center for scholarly research in the social sciences and related disciplines on issues of public policy at UMBC. The project PI is Dr. Donald F. Norris who is also the MIPAR director. The University of Maryland Baltimore County (UMBC) is a mid-sized, research university with an enrollment of about 11,000 students including 2,500 graduate students and a faculty of some 400 full-time members. UMBC's current Carnegie classification is Doctoral/Research-Extensive. The

The federal partner for this research is the Office of Telecommunications and Information Applications (OTIA) in the National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA) of the U.S. Department of Commerce.