Chapter XXXIV
Public Libraries and Local E-Government

Paul T. Jaeger
University of Maryland, USA

ABSTRACT

Many residents and local communities rely on public libraries for access to and training to use e-government. Many local governments direct citizens to the public library for help in using e-government, while citizens seek help from the public library in using local e-government when they have no other means of connecting or when they want help using e-government. As a result, public libraries now serve not only as instrumentalities of local government, but as a primary location for access to local e-government and a very successful link between citizens to e-government. As residents, communities, and governments rely on public libraries as a main access point to e-government, it essential to better understand the connection and education roles of public libraries to improve the delivery of local e-government.

INTRODUCTION

While public libraries in the United States have long been trusted institutions within their communities, as a result of recent advances in technology and changes in society, public libraries now play a unique and critical social role by ensuring free public Internet access to community members. Nearly every public library in the United States now offers free Internet access—98.9% of public library branches are connected to the Internet and 98.4% of connected public library branches offer public Internet access (Bertot, McClure, Jaeger, & Ryan, 2006). As a result, public libraries fill a community need by ensuring that all citizens have access to and assistance in using e-government. A significant proportion of the United States population—including people who have no other means of access, people who need help using technology, and people who have lower quality access—rely on the access and trust the assistance available in public libraries to use e-government websites (Jaeger & Fleischmann, 2007). With the increasing necessity of the Internet as a means

of access to government services and information, the free access provided by public libraries is an invaluable resource to local communities, residents, and local governments.

Residents are not the only ones who have come to rely on access to e-government in public libraries. Federal, state, and local government agencies now also rely on public libraries to provide citizens with access to and guidance in using e-government websites, forms, and services; many government agencies simply direct citizens to the nearest public library for help (Bertot, Jaeger, Langa, & McClure, 2006a, 2006b). Many local government agencies now direct citizens to the nearest public library for access and help in applying for permits, scheduling appointments, paying fees and taxes, and completing numerous other local government functions online. This confluence of events has created a major new social role for public libraries—guarantors of e-government access.

This chapter explores the relationships between local e-government and public libraries, a relationship made more interesting by the fact that public libraries are also local government entities. Drawing upon several different streams of data about public libraries and e-government, this chapter will explore the issues related to public libraries' position as local government agency and local e-government access point. This chapter will explore:

- The reasons that public libraries became local access points for e-government
- The impacts of local political environments on the delivery of e-government in public libraries
- The effect of trust placed in public libraries on local e-government usage
- The ways in which public libraries impact the delivery of local e-government services
- The influence of the public library on citizen interaction with e-government

While public libraries in the United States have been extremely successful in linking citizens and e-government, it essential to better understand the roles of public libraries in access to and education about local e-government in order to improve the delivery of e-government and to identify lessons from these efforts that can be translated to other nations.

BACKGROUND

Governments at all levels are showing a strong preference for delivering services via the Internet, primarily as a means of boosting cost-efficiency and reducing time spent on direct interactions with citizens (Ebbers, Pieterson, & Noordman, 2008). However, citizens still show a strong preference for in person or phone-based interactions with government representatives when they have questions or are seeking services, though individuals with higher levels of education are typically more open to using online interactions with government (Ebbers, Pieterson, & Noordman, 2008; Steib & Navarro, 2006). E-government services are limited often by difficulties in searching for and locating the desired information, as well as lack of availability of computers and Internet access for many segments of the general population (Bertot & Jaeger, 2008; Singh & Sahu, in press). Such problems are exacerbated by a general lack of familiarity of the structure of government and which agencies to contact and attitudes toward technology and government among many citizens (Jaeger & Thompson, 2003, 2004). Also, as many e-government sites give more emphasis to presenting political agendas rather than promoting democratic participation, users are becoming less trusting of the sites themselves (Jaeger, 2005, 2007). Further complications arise from the fact that many government agencies are ambivalent about direct citizen participation in the political process (Roberts, 2004).

Nevertheless, many citizens look to e-government as a valuable source of information, considering e-government sites to be "objective

Related Content

e-Society and Children's Participation: Risk, Opportunities, and Barriers
Brian O'Neill (2013). *Information Systems and Technology for Organizations in a Networked Society (pp. 1-16).*
www.irma-international.org/chapter/society-children-participation/76528

Architecture-Driven Service Discovery for Service Centric Systems
A. Kozlenkov, G. Spanoudakis, A. Zisman, V. Fasoulasand F. Sanchez (2008). *Electronic Government: Concepts, Methodologies, Tools, and Applications (pp. 811-842).*
www.irma-international.org/chapter/architecture-driven-service-discovery-service/9753

A Metamorphic Testing Approach for Online Testing of Service-Oriented Software Applications
W. Chan, S. C. Cheungand Karl R.P.H. Leung (2008). *Electronic Government: Concepts, Methodologies, Tools, and Applications (pp. 2487-2507).*
www.irma-international.org/chapter/metamorphic-testing-approach-online-testing/9870

Biometric Authentication in Broadland Networks for Location-Based Services
Stelios C.A. Thompoulosand Nikolaos Argyreas (2008). *Electronic Government: Concepts, Methodologies, Tools, and Applications (pp. 4110-4120).*
www.irma-international.org/chapter/biometric-authentication-broadland-networks-location/9986

A Unified Smart City Model (USCM) for Smart City Conceptualization and Benchmarking
Leonidas Anthopoulos, Marijn Janssenand Vishanth Weerakkody (2016). *International Journal of Electronic Government Research (pp. 77-93).*
www.irma-international.org/article/a-unified-smart-city-model-uscm-for-smart-city-conceptualization-and-benchmarking/162739