Chapter 15
i-Government:
Interactive Government Enabling Civic Engagement and a New Volunteerism

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ABSTRACT

This research is intended to introduce a new concept of Interactive Government (i-Government), provide an overview of current practices, and offer recommendations for development and implementation. i-Government is the use of smartphone applications to: a) connect citizens with resources; b) engage citizens in collaboration; c) empower citizens as volunteers; and d) enable citizens to serve as watchdogs. Smartphone applications enable government agencies to provide citizens with information and resources anytime (24/7), from anywhere. This anytime, anywhere feature, combined with smartphone technology such as a camera, GPS/location detection service, and an Internet browser, allows citizens to interact with government by accessing information and providing real-time data. Citizens become a new type of volunteer force, who serve as sensors in the community, and who provide information on anything from potholes, to graffiti, to suspicious activity. Because smartphones are always on, government agencies can directly contact citizens who are also willing to serve their community.

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INTRODUCTION

The basis for Interactive Government (*i*-Government) is the 2007 introduction of Apple's iPhone, the first smartphone with widespread distribution that combined a phone, camera, Personal Digital Assistant (PDA), and Internet connectivity, with a user-friendly browser, touch screen, GPS/location detection service, multi-media capabilities, and many other technology features. Developers utilized this powerful mobile technology to develop software applications (apps) for use with the iPhone (and later, other smartphones such as Android) that utilized the advanced technology for games, entertainment, productivity tools, news, social networking, and much more. By 2010, government applications were being developed to enable citizens to quickly and easily connect with government agencies *anytime,* from *anywhere*.

This article explores the progression of government interaction with citizens from the use of Electronic Government (E-Government) to Mobile Government (M-Government) to the advent of Interactive Government (*i*-Government). It provides a survey of current *i*-Government applications that fall into several categories including applications that a) connect citizens to government resources; b) engage citizens in collaboration with government agencies; c) empower citizens as volunteers; and d) enable citizens as watchdogs. Additionally, the article presents information on turn-key solutions being used in several cities, implementation successes, and challenges of actual start-up operations. This initial exploration of the current uses of *i*-Government applications is intended to provide a base upon which practitioners and researchers can begin an evaluation of the effectiveness of this interactive technology which is intended to connect, engage, and empower, citizens as sensors in the community.

BACKGROUND

E-Government

Electronic Government (E-Government) has been a practice since the 1990s, where federal, state and local government agencies apply Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs), such as basic Internet applications, to deliver government services, engage citizens, and improve efficiencies (Trimi & Sheng, 2008). E-Government began as a way for government information and services to be available to the public 24/7 through the Internet. During the period known as Web 1.0, these types of websites included information such as: a) how to access government services; b) hours of operations; and c) ways to obtain and/or pay for information, such as obtaining copies of birth certificates, paying property taxes, and filing for permits and licenses. E-Government provided a means to make services more convenient for the citizens and reduce the cost of services provided by the government agencies. Recent research done by CitySourced, a smartphone application platform developer, estimated that walk-in services (a citizen walking into a government building to obtain services) costs a government agency approximately $9 per contact, whereas an online, web-based self service transaction can result in costs to the government agency as low as $0.24 to $0.65 per contact (K.Daradics, personal communication, 2011).

E-Government to M-Government

E-Government focused on computer-based internet applications to connect citizens with government agencies. This connection was available whenever the citizen was logged in to his/her computer. M-Government utilized text messages to disseminate time-sensitive information from government agencies to citizens mobile phones. Unlike computer-based internet services, mobile phones provided a means to reach citizens *anytime*