An Interview with Andy Stein, IT Director for Newport News, Virginia, and Project Owner of localgovernments.core.gov

1) *Why is Newport News, Virginia interested in developing components in collaboration with other cities?*

We are interested because it will benefit everyone in the long term. We will be able to provide better quality software at lower cost. It will result in better service and better value to our taxpayers. The service will also be more consistent from one jurisdiction to the other and the systems will be interoperating better across government agencies and geographic boundaries. We will be able to do more with less and we will be able to effectively leverage the vast amount of IT resources in local governments today.

We are also very interested because the alternative we face is to take a traditional "solo" approach and replace our application portfolio at a cost of about $30 million. We have 155 old applications, or 80 percent of our software portfolio, which must be replaced in the next few years. If we succeed with collaboration, it could lead to significant savings.

2) *Have you found a lot of resistance on the part of local governments to the idea of sharing components?*

There is very little resistance to the "idea" of sharing software components, but the practical aspects of engaging others is difficult. I promoted this concept for more than a year to many local government agencies, external and internal to the City of Newport News. There is some enthusiastic support in the non-technical circles. From IT professionals, I am getting the full range of reactions but most frequently negative ones such as "not practical," or "it will not work."

I am new to local government, but my understanding is that the concept of sharing software has been tried for a long time with limited success. Many seem to remember the failures of the past too well and this sounds like a new attempt at the same thing. It is difficult to get over this resistance and paint a new picture of

enabling technology that is now available and proven for collaboration. In the past, sharing software was tedious and difficult to accomplish. Today the collaborative landscape has changed dramatically with the advent of Open Source and the Internet.

3) *What is your vision for the future of localgovernments.core.gov?*

With CORE.GOV we are creating a central repository of city/county software for the entire United States. All localities have similar functions that they automate, such as Tax Collection, Real Estate Assessment, Budget Preparation and Management, Finance and Accounting, Public Safety Automation Systems, Jail and Court Management Systems, Utility Billing, Parks and Recreation, etc. These systems are very similar in capabilities from one jurisdiction to the other, yet many of us currently are custom building applications because no practical means of sharing has been established.

Open Source has demonstrated that there are today Internet-enabled practical means for software developers to collaborate and produce added value to all. We intend to apply the technology of Open Source to collaboratively develop one portfolio of reusable applications. When one municipality enhances the value of an application, all localities will benefit.

Localities already own software that is free of copyright restrictions, which could be shared at CORE.GOV. The value of software in the repository could be enhanced through collaboration, which is an incentive for localities to contribute their appropriate software assets.

This could be the beginning of a new model for cost sharing of application software in local government. We have about 22,000 cities and counties in the U.S., with a significant pool of collective resources. The value we can derive if we band together is significantly higher than what we accomplish today.

4) *What legal implications are there for local governments sharing components? Has your legal department checked this out?*

Yes, I have consulted my legal department about the legality of sharing components. They advised me that the copyright on components developed by the City and its agents and employees is owned by the City. They further advise that the copyright on components developed collaboratively by the City and other authors (persons or entities) is owned jointly by the City and those authors. If jointly authored, the rights of the various authors will be determined by the agreement between them.

Taking this into consideration, there is no legal prohibition to sharing work so long as the City has approved this arrangement. The Newport News City Manager has

approved our collaboration with other authors to develop open source components and we have proceeded in that direction. In other words, the City Manager has made a conscious decision not to enforce the copyrights owned by the City so long as the components are used and licensed as open source components. By collaboratively developing components, the City will actually own or co-own the component, as opposed to only renting the component, as well as having a royalty free license to benefit from updates and enhancements to the component at no additional cost or obligation to the City. If there were ever a win/win public/public or public/private effort by the City on its citizens' behalf, this would certainly be it.

5) *What has been your experience of using CORE.GOV so far? What lessons have you learned from using it?*

We are using CORE.GOV with the University of Southern Mississippi to develop our first Open Source application. We found the Discussion Forums very beneficial to get a large group moving in the same direction. We uploaded our project documents and we keep them current on CORE.GOV. The library function helps to manage changes.

We are encouraging other localities to get on board. The real potential will be realized once a critical mass of local governments join the process.

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Andy Stein can be reached at astein@core.gov.