

# **CITIZENS LEAGUE**

708 South Third Street, Suite 500  
Minneapolis, MN 55415  
Telephone: (612) 338-0791  
Facsimile: (612) 337-5919  
Email: [info@citizensleague.net](mailto:info@citizensleague.net)  
[www.citizensleague.net](http://www.citizensleague.net)

## **Getting Online Government Back on Track:**

### **How Minnesota Can Capture Savings and Improve Customer Service**



Report of the Citizens League Study Committee on  
e-Government Services for Minnesota

February, 2003

# Getting Online Government Back on Track:

How Minnesota Can Capture Savings and Improve Customer Service

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Providing efficient, effective and responsive public services to citizens is not a new challenge. Each new administration appropriately pledges to further these objectives, as did the Pawlenty Administration in 2003. With a looming five billion dollar deficit, there is even more urgency to capture these savings.

Reform in the state's service delivery systems is essential, and the set of tools that fall under what has been variously termed "e-government" or "electronic government services" offer an excellent opportunity to facilitate this necessary transformation. Such initiatives can also help build civic confidence by offering citizens greater flexibility for interacting with their government.

While budget crises usually prompt cutbacks in investments, this is precisely the time that Minnesota needs to make an aggressive push into electronic government services. By tapping advanced information, computing and telecommunications technologies, the state can provide faster, better and cheaper services to its citizens and businesses. A true win-win opportunity exists.

As one example of the untapped potential for savings, a discount airline calculated that the cost of a paper ticket is \$8.50, while an online ticket costs only 25 cents. In Minnesota, only about four percent of state government transactions are now online.

## **Where Minnesota Needs To Go, And How It Can Get There**

This report suggests a blueprint for Minnesota to regain and retain its leadership in web-based services. The action items are designed to:

- Increase convenience and access for the state's multiple customers, and capture savings through greater efficiency;
- Ingrain a web-centric culture so that e-government is appropriately viewed as a strategic resource, rather than an expense; and
- Move Minnesota back into the top ten in state web rankings, and retain this position through continuous improvement.

Just five years ago, Minnesota was ranked among the top ten states in the country for its technology efforts. In one recent survey, the state had slipped to 37<sup>th</sup> in the overall quality and depth of its web services. Although some progress has been made, other states have far outpaced these limited efforts. In order for Minnesota to regain its standing as a leader in citizen-focused web technology, the following four steps are necessary:

## 1. Provide Sustained Leadership

The single most important ingredient for success is leadership throughout the state government. Sustained support from the Governor and Legislature is essential to instill web-based technologies as a core cultural value. State and local governments must understand and accept this goal, and continuous support and funding must be provided as an unalterable priority.

- **Designate web-based technology as one of the Governor's top three priorities.** States that are consistently ranked in the top five for electronic government services all benefit from strong leadership from their top executive. Governor Pawlenty should set a goal for Minnesota to be ranked among the top ten states in e-government by 2005, midway through his term. In addition, annual goals should challenge state government to continually increase the percentage of transactions that are conducted online.
- **Provide statewide leadership in web-based technologies.** The state must also provide the necessary leadership to promote e-government throughout Minnesota. State government should provide incentives, define common standards and set the example for local governments, rather than hinder their progress through inaction or legal and procedural barriers. Local agency cross-jurisdictional cooperation should also be encouraged. Citizens care about the service they receive, not about which government agency is responsible.
- **Have the Chief Information Officer (CIO) report directly to the Governor.** The Commissioner of Administration currently serves as the CIO for the state, and this model is not conducive to progress. With no authority over other agencies, it is difficult for the CIO to implement innovative electronic government services throughout the executive branch. An independent CIO reporting directly to the governor should have central budgetary authority over all state technology investments. The Department of Administration should focus on internal administrative operations and provide support for the necessary reforms.
- **Establish a joint legislative technology committee.** Technology is currently an afterthought in the legislative process. A joint committee would facilitate review, and speed the implementation of e-government by providing a common forum for the legislative, executive and judicial branches of government to work together.

## 2. Capture Cost Savings

There are multiple benefits associated with supplying government services electronically. The Drivers and Vehicles Division of the Minnesota Department of Public Safety and University of Minnesota are two stellar success stories that should be

emulated. Transactional costs were reduced, access to services was vastly improved, and staff was redeployed to deal with higher value customer services rather than paperwork.

- **Make high volume, high cost services a priority.** To focus its efforts, the state should immediately identify cost savings opportunities that can be either captured or redeployed. Transactions that are either high volume or high cost (licensing, registration and tax services) offer the greatest opportunity to reduce costs by either automating high volume transactions or decreasing the expense of high cost transactions. In addition, citizens and businesses would be allowed to work and interact with government more efficiently and at their own convenience. This lowers their costs, improves customer service and supports business development.
- **Migrate as many transactions as possible to the web.** The key to capturing cost savings is the reduction of hands-on paper processing. “Channel incentives” should be provided to increase the level of customer self-service, and thereby reduce end-to-end transaction costs. Although access and digital divide issues need to be considered, parallel web and paper systems need to be eliminated to reduce the last-dollar costs of manual transactions. Government-to-government and government-to-vendor transactions should be required to be completed electronically in order to compel savings and encourage web service deployment. As an example of the potential, an estimated 95 percent of all banking transactions are now online, compared with only four percent in state government.

### 3. Emphasize Customer Service

State efforts must be refocused on end-user customers, rather than on internal operations. As one telling example of the need for cultural change, some state agency web-based transactions assess a “convenience” charge, even though they save on operating costs. This philosophy must be reversed.

- **Restructure the state website to be more customer-focused.** The Northstar website should be reorganized by three interaction categories: citizen-to-government, business-to-government, and government-to-government. Customers should be able to move seamlessly, without “digging” through multiple web pages to find the correct service. Although some changes were recently made, Minnesota’s revised website is still far behind other states. As examples, the “My California” website allows citizens to customize the website to meet their specific needs. Many states, such as Alabama, offer multiple language options.
- **Make Northstar a true government portal.** Minnesota’s website should serve as a comprehensive government services portal by offering integrated links to local, state and federal agencies. Northstar should be the link for citizens to interact

with their “government,” not separate agencies. Large portals offer greater transaction cost savings, improve citizen access and satisfaction, and allow more unification of legacy systems. These benefits greatly outweigh the significant upfront costs often associated with large portal development.

- **Market Northstar to increase usage.** In order to be successful, citizens and businesses need to be educated about the capabilities and advantages of web-based services. Marketing, like that used for ISEEK, can increase web-enabled transaction volume, and thereby decrease total agency operating costs. As one example, Pennsylvania creatively printed their state’s web portal address on all vehicle license plates. This inexpensive and highly effective marketing strategy promoted the web portal and elevated public awareness of the system.
- **Establish customer advisory boards.** Advisory panels should be established for citizen, business and government customers to track what they really want in electronic services.

#### 4. Provide Entrepreneurial Incentives

State agencies should be provided incentives to invest time and resources into electronic services. Current practices actually discourage such investments.

- **Apply lower budget reduction targets** for those departments making web investments that save current and future costs.
- **Allow departments to retain 10 percent of any savings** to use in their own budgets. The remaining 90 percent could be returned to the state’s general fund or be reinvested in other electronic service projects.
- **Allow web investments to remain in base budgets.** This accounting approach would treat public agency investments similar to private sector depreciation.
- **Eliminate legal barriers.** Statutes and rules that hinder web-based services should be eliminated. As examples of such barriers, certain data practices requirements discourage efficient information sharing, and legal notice rules require antiquated and redundant publication.
- **Establish a flexible technology development fund** to encourage the ongoing development and adoption of rapidly changing technologies, and to provide incentives for significant cross-departmental initiatives.

## Findings of the Committee on Electronic Government Services

The preceding recommendations are based on the findings of the Citizens League Committee on Electronic Government Services. The Committee reviewed numerous background reports and studies, and heard testimony from representatives of the Minnesota Department of Administration, Minnesota Legislature and University of Minnesota. Key findings include:

### Significant Savings and Service Improvements Are Possible

Well documented savings and service improvements attributable to web-based technologies are plentiful in both the public and private sectors. For example, one recent study conducted by McKinsey Quarterly estimates savings in the thirty-five to forty-five percent range for large service portals.

There are also many Minnesota success stories for electronic government services. As one recently publicized example, automation in the Driver and Vehicle Services Division of the Minnesota Department of Public Safety reduced drivers' license issuance by 25 days, cut vehicle registration by 12 days and reduced title processing time by 30 days. The American Association of Motor Vehicle Administrators estimates dramatic cost savings of online services in the sixty-five percent range. Once known for its inefficiency, the Driver and Vehicle Services Division is now leading the way. Their success should serve as a model for other agencies to emulate.

As another local example, the cumbersome University of Minnesota registration process was once the stuff of legend. Years after leaving college, alumni would describe their negative experiences in their refusals to donate money to the institution. A few years ago, the University of Minnesota made a major commitment to instill a culture of web services, and the impact of the transformation has been unprecedented. Students now do countless tasks online, from registration to student aid to coursework to class interaction. When the system was presented to a group of parent alums, they reacted with a standing ovation.

### Priority Opportunity Areas Need To Be Systematically Targeted

The State of Minnesota has made some progress in capturing savings and improving services, but success appears more random than systematic. Past web-based service improvements seem more related to individual departmental interests, rather than an overall commitment and systematic effort throughout the executive branch. A more organized approach is needed.

The U.S. Office of Management and Budget identified 24 opportunity areas to guide federal electronic service development. This effort focused on high cost, high

volume transactions to capture the greatest savings. The State of Minnesota would benefit from a similar approach.

### **Sustained Leadership From The Governor Is Essential**

However, it will take more than a list of priority improvements to achieve a lower cost, more self-service government. Governor Pawlenty needs to provide sustained support and encouragement to accelerate the transformation to a more comprehensive e-government strategy.

In recent studies released by Brown University and the Progress and Freedom Foundation, the top ranked state web pages (Arizona, Michigan, Utah and Virginia) were all strongly championed by their governors. The Governor of Utah, for example, has made the increased use of web portals and e-government one of his top three priorities.

In order for Minnesota to better serve its citizens, businesses and other units of government, implementation of increased e-government capabilities, online transactions and useful applications need to be a top priority of the Governor and the executive branch.

### **Significant Organizational Barriers Exist**

Within Minnesota's current organizational structure, the Commissioner of Administration serves as the Chief Information Officer (CIO) for the state. This position is directly responsible for e-government.

However, the relationship between the Commissioner and other departments is a fraternal one, meaning there is no rank and command authority. Further, the Department of Administration is responsible for numerous other functions beyond technology, which dilutes the focus on web-based development, and creates the potential for policy conflicts.

Greater "top-down authority" is needed to accelerate the necessary progress both within and across all state agencies. When it was first established, the Office of Technology reported directly to the Governor, and this structure should be reestablished. Based on the success of other states, a sustained push directly from the Office of the Governor appears to be an indispensable ingredient for success.

### **Funding Structures Are Also Problematic**

Tough state budget times make it tempting to cut e-government services, but paradoxically, this is precisely the time to accelerate these approaches to save money in the long term. Finding ways to fund the "front end" of systems that can save a great



deal over the medium to long term is a major and pressing leadership challenge for the new Governor and 2003 Legislature.

In the private sector, large-scale web portals are commonly funded as capital projects with a multi-year payback, rather than expensed in a single budget cycle. While legal or constitutional complications might exist, this technique needs to be explored, and barriers overcome as necessary with new legislation.

Other solutions for funding and budget issues are possible within the current state system. Departments should be provided incentives to make the necessary investments, rather than penalized. For example, savings might be shared, or web investments might be retained in agency base budgets.

### **Minnesota's e-Government Ranking Is Not Acceptable**

National rankings provide a useful bottom-line barometer, and should be used to gauge progress. Minnesota's standing is mixed.

As a positive, many cities and counties have accomplished a great deal, both individually and collectively through partnerships, such as that organized by the League of Minnesota Cities. At the state level, the Minnesota Legislature ranks in the top ten for providing electronic access to information. However, offering a look-up service for laws in the making is a relatively limited and straightforward application of e-government.

More complex web-based transactions are far more valuable to citizens, and result in significantly greater savings. Unfortunately, Minnesota's use of the web has been ranked in separate major surveys as 20<sup>th</sup> and 37<sup>th</sup> in overall quality and depth. In this latter survey, Minnesota only ranks among the top 25 states in three of the eight main areas of e-government. This standing is clearly unacceptable.

### **The Organizational Culture Must Be Changed**

Throughout Minnesota state government, information technology is not yet widely viewed as a strategic resource for better, faster and cheaper public services. It's treated as an expense to be avoided. This culture has to change.

Use of the Internet and web portals is very widespread within the private sector. It is encouraged by Boards of Directors, and is often a top priority of corporate CEOs. It is even becoming more commonplace within quasi-governmental organizations.

For example, the University of Minnesota created an aggressive vision to supply electronic services to their customers (students). The initial phase offered online student class registration, and the system now encompasses housing registration and

financial aid. These activities are among the University's most resource draining and high volume transactions. Through automation, the University has reduced the time required for some of these processes by as much as 90 percent.

The reason for the University's success is two-fold. First, senior administrators realized the value of the vision and believed in its potential benefits, which have now been realized. Second, the Board of Regents, many of whom hold leadership positions in the private sector, understand that e-services allow them to enhance competitive value, control costs and increase productivity.

Success in the private sector is directly related to a shared vision among the Board, CEO, senior and middle management. This is not the case in Minnesota state government. The Governor as CEO, Legislature as Board of Directors, and commissioners and career service managers as organizational management do not share a common commitment to electronic government services.

All of these players need to believe in the vision of how e-government will benefit Minnesota, improve relations between the government and its citizens, encourage businesses to develop in Minnesota and thereby promote economic growth and stability, and persuade knowledge-based citizens to stay in Minnesota to be active participants in the economy and their government.

A unified vision and a common agreement that e-government is an essential means of making Minnesota a better place, will help turn around the state's unacceptably low ranking on electronic government services.

## **Appendix A: Additional Resources**

AAMVA, (2001). "e-Government: A Cost Model to Compare the Marginal Costs of Traditional DMV transaction Delivery to an e-Government Delivery System" A report by the AAMVA Electronic Government Working Group, August 2001.

<http://www.aamva.org/Documents/egvCostStudy.pdf>

Accenture, (2001). E-government Leadership, Rhetoric vs. Reality -- Closing the Gap. [http://www.accenture.com/xd/xd.asp?it=enweb&xd=industries%5Cgovernment%5Cgove\\_study.xml](http://www.accenture.com/xd/xd.asp?it=enweb&xd=industries%5Cgovernment%5Cgove_study.xml)

Accenture, (2002). E-government Leadership: Realizing the Vision. [http://www.accenture.com/xd/xd.asp?it=enWeb&xd=industries%5Cgovernment%5Cgove\\_welcome.xml](http://www.accenture.com/xd/xd.asp?it=enWeb&xd=industries%5Cgovernment%5Cgove_welcome.xml)

McKinsey, (2001). Putting Citizens On-line, Not in Line. A report published in The McKinsey Quarterly, 2001 number 2.

[http://www.mckinseyquarterly.com/article\\_print.asp?ar=1020&L2=33&L3=94](http://www.mckinseyquarterly.com/article_print.asp?ar=1020&L2=33&L3=94)

West, D. (2001). State and Federal E-Government in the United States, 2001. Harvard University and Brown University. [http://www.brown.edu/Departments/Taubman\\_Center/polreports/egovt01us.html](http://www.brown.edu/Departments/Taubman_Center/polreports/egovt01us.html)

West, D. (2002) State and Federal E-Government in the United States, 2002. Harvard University and Brown University. <http://www.insidepolitics.org/Egovt02us.html>

Progress and Freedom Foundation, (2002). The Digital State 2002: How State Governments Use Digital Technologies.

<http://www.pff.org/publications/DS2002FINAL.pdf>

**Appendix B: Cost Model: Executive Summary of the AAMVA report, full report available at <http://www.aamva.org/Documents/egvCostStudy.pdf>**

e-Government leverages technology, specifically the Internet, to simplify the delivery of government services. Furthermore, e-government improves the business of government by making government more efficient and convenient for the customers. Activities performed through e-government can be in the nature of transactions, information or education, to name a few. The specific focus for this paper is on online transaction services that serve external constituents to the agency, that is, the customer.

e-Government has the following benefits over traditional transaction service delivery, i.e., over the counter (OTC):

- **Less expensive** - e-Government transactions eliminate the vast majority of brick and mortar and labor costs. Research for this paper concludes that e-government transactions cost 65% less compared to OTC transactions. Using e-government leverages technology to reduce the cost of each transaction offered. It's a focus on the best use of scarce resources. The details of the cost comparison start in Section III.
- **More convenient hours** - e-Government transactions are available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. This provides customers the flexibility to process transactions outside standard government office hours.
- **Reduced travel and waiting** - Ubiquitous access is available from any home or off-site computer or from any phone. e-government removes the travel and eliminates the associated wait-time involved as well. An ancillary benefit is reduced wait-times for OTC transactions due to fewer customer visits.
- **Benefits all customers** - e-Government benefits those that use the services and those that do not. As more and more transactions move from in-line to on-line, the customer that does not use e-government is able to get better service while in a government office due to reduced wait time and ability of staff to focus on more complex transactions.
- **Reduction in bad check processing** - Bad check processing time and expenses will decrease due to the fact that more customers will be utilizing credit cards to pay for their transactions.
- **Customer goodwill/perception** - e-Government allows government agencies to show customers that DMV's are progressive and responsive to constituent requests and requirements.

- **Process improvement** - e-Government often serves as a catalyst to perform business reengineering. Process improvement must continue when analyzing service for e-government. If the fundamental transaction is inadequate, automation will not improve the efficiency. This process improvement often enhances the service electronically and also has benefits for the continued OTC process.
- **Reduction of time to recognize money** - e-Government transactions are usually paid with credit cards so recognition of the funds into state bank accounts is faster.

## **THE WORK OF THE CITIZENS LEAGUE STUDY COMMITTEE**

### **Charge to the Study Committee**

The Citizens League Board of Directors approved the following charge to the committee on e-government services for the state of Minnesota:

The state of Minnesota is not currently among highly ranked states in the use of e-government technologies such as the Internet and World Wide Web to provide more convenient and lower cost public services through e-government.

The charge to the study committee is to come up with “an e-government framework for better public services in Minnesota”. A core question is: what kind of policy and financing framework does the state of Minnesota need for using the Internet and related technologies to move ahead more rapidly in improving public services and producing savings?

### **Committee Membership**

The *Citizens League Study Committee on e-Government Services in Minnesota* was co-chaired by Kathryn Roberts and John Gunyou. A total of 27 individuals took an active part in the committee. The committee met 4 times between November 12, 2002 and January 9, 2003. The Citizens League Board of Directors approved the report on January 17, 2003. In addition to the chairs, the members of the committee were:

David Alden	Sydney Jensen
William Au-Yeung	Don Jones
Bill Batcher	Ryan Kanne
Luci Botzek	Tom LaForce
Bill Boudewyns	Kathleen Lamb
Jim Brimeyer	Michael Nguyen
Keith Butcher	Nancy Nystuen
Linda Ewen	Christian Rummelhoff
Richard Fauce	Jaime Simmons
Michael Fratto	Steven Struthers
Lynn Gitelis	Dee Stuart
Rick Heydinger	Robert Winthrop
William Hoffman	

**Meetings and Resource Testimony.** Resource testimony was provided to the members of the Committee by the following people:

Kari Branjord; Director, Office of Information Technology, University of Minnesota  
Reggie David; Assistant Commissioner, Department of Administration  
Linda Finley; Director of Statewide Information Policy, Department of Administration  
David Fisher; Commissioner, Department of Administration  
Senator Steve Kelley; Minnesota State Senate

**Staffing.** Scott McMahon staffed this committee with assistance from Lyle Wray. Trudy Koroschetz and Gayle Ruther provided administrative support.

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## WHAT IS THE CITIZENS LEAGUE

**The Citizens League promotes the public interest in Minnesota by involving citizens in identifying and framing critical public policy choices, forging recommendations and advocating their adoption.**

The Citizens League has been an active and effective public affairs research and education organization in the Twin Cities metropolitan area for 50 years.

Volunteer research committees of League members study policy issues in depth and develop informational reports that propose specific workable solutions to public issues. Recommendations in these reports often become law. Over the years, League reports have been a reliable source of information for governmental officials, community leaders, and citizens concerned with public policy issues of our area.

The League depends upon the support of individual members and contributions from businesses, foundations, and other organizations throughout the metropolitan area.

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