

Fresno County: Connecting customers to multi-agency, Internet-based government services

BY HAL EIDAL

Fresno County undertook a Central California regional e-government initiative in July 2002 to improve the delivery of services to citizens, employees, business and governmental partners.

All incorporated cities within the County of Fresno, and the Council of Governments, are supporting the initiative. In a letter to the Board of Supervisors, the Fresno Area Collaborative Regional Initiative (CRI), a joint venture between the Fresno Business Council and the Office of Community and Economic Development at Fresno State, voiced its support as well.

The major objectives of the initiative are to simplify access to governmental services; improve the internal efficiencies of the local agencies; increase the cooperation among the local agencies by sharing information and resources; and to improve the business environment as it is impacted by government services and regulations.

Fresno County customers will benefit from simplified access via a common regional portal that provides government information and services 24-hours a day, every day of the year:

A Regional e-Government Task Force was created to accomplish this initiative. The task force has adopted the following vision to evaluate all phases of our development: acquisition, implementation, maintenance and operation of the multi-agency Internet based e-government systems. Our vision statement is: "To ensure customer satisfaction with Central Cali-



The common portal through which users can access regional services.

fornia regional Internet-based, government services.”

Methodology

The most important aspect of establishing this type of regional collaboration is to have a champion or champions at a high level, who are willing to create and nurture relationships with other governmental agencies. In this case, there are three champions: Kathy Millison, city manager of Clovis; Bart Bohn, Fresno County administrative officer and Phil Atkisson, chief information officer of Fresno County.

These champions presented the vision of a regional e-government initiative to all government leaders, including a definition

of the process and benefits to the customers of the regional e-government system. The champions requested the creation of a regional structure to evaluate and create a vision document and a strategic plan for the initiative’s implementation. The result was the creation of both a vision statement and a strategic plan in September 2002. The team’s work continues on the items described in the “What is next?” portion of this article.

Services

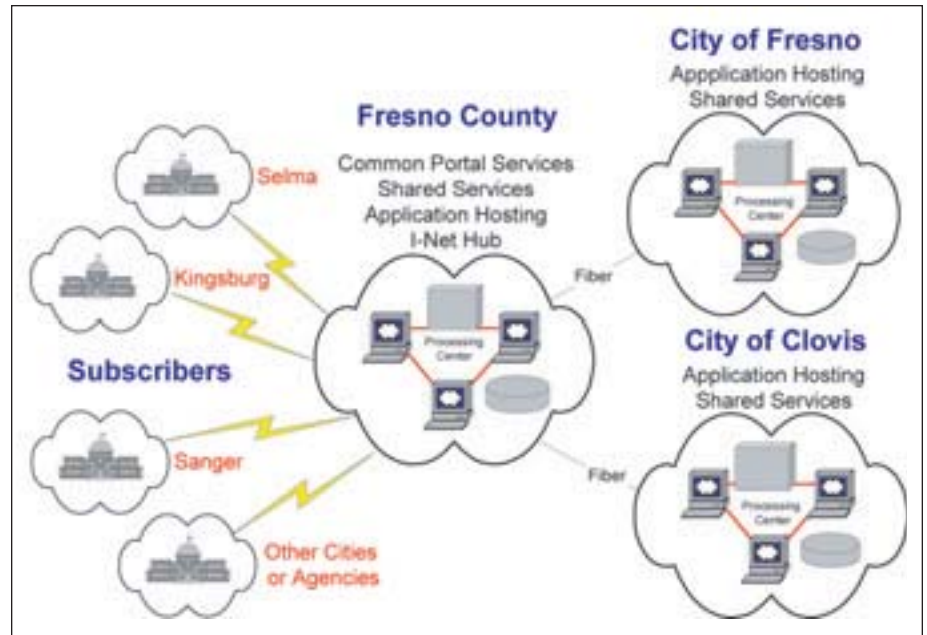
Electronic government (e-government) combines technology, inter- and intra-agency cooperation and creativity to enable

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citizens and businesses to interact more efficiently with government using the Internet and other electronic communications.

The Central California Regional e-Government Initiative will use the power of the Internet to make a wide range of local government services and information instantly and easily available to all residents of the region, initially defined as that area in and around Fresno County. Through the deployment of a common geo-based web portal to county, city and special district services and information, the constituents and user base will not be required to determine agency of jurisdiction or political sub-divisions or boundaries to request services over the Internet. The "smart" portal will point the requestor to the correct jurisdiction, based on the requestor's address and service required.

Examples of services to be made avail-



A diagram of the Fresno County I-Net Hub.

able include health and human service requests, employment and employment training, licenses and permits. Electronic payments of taxes, utility bills and child

support will be an initial function of the portal software. With scores of applications in the queue, a uniform building permit processing system is planned as the initial

application, with the goal to adopt one permitting system for the county and all cities within the region.

For example: a building contractor will be able to log onto the Internet and enter the addresses and/or assessor's parcel number of several sites for which roofing permits are required, apply for, pay for and receive those permits, without regard for which jurisdiction the activities are located in. Also, a customer that lives in the unincorporated portion of the county such as Coalinga, which is 60 miles from the permitting agent for the county, but does not have access to the Internet in their home will be able to simply drive to the City of Coalinga and have a county roofing permit issued at that site rather than 60 miles away in downtown Fresno.

The customer base for e-government affects all aspects of our society, including:

- Citizens.
- Visitors.

- Businesses.
- Schools and universities.
- Legislature.
- Government employees.
- Political subdivisions (State agencies, counties, cities, districts).
 - Organizations (Nonprofits, associations etc).
 - Courts.
 - Research partners.

How the system works

The regional common portal (see page 27) will provide the one "government face" to the customer and provide a jurisdictional blind effect so that the customer will not have to know what agency and/or department within those agencies provides the services that they desire or need. The common portal will locate the service the customer desires and provide a simple environment for the customer.

Connecting governments

The regional institutional network (I-Net) is the backbone of the entire e-government initiative. This network allows the government agencies to "look and feel" like one government entity to the customer, as well as provide the mechanism to share data and systems from government to government. We have three regional sponsor agencies that provide regional computing capability. These are the County of Fresno and the cities of Fresno and Clovis.

As depicted in the graphic on page 28, the County of Fresno is providing the common regional portal and the I-Net hub, as well as shared services and application hosting for the other sponsors and the subscribers. The cities of Clovis and Fresno provide application hosting and shared services to the sponsors and subscribers. As of this writing, we have three subscribers using regional shared services, and three

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to existing Web sites within the region, and creating interfaces to existing applications that can be shared among regional e-government participants.

- Implementing a uniform permitting and licensing software system on sponsor's application hosting facilities, to be made available to the other sponsors and to subscriber agencies. The system is funded by a grant from the San Joaquin Air Pollution Control District.

- Establishing agreements for sharing of appropriate existing data, applications, programs and systems in order to implement the government-to-government aspect of the e-government initiative.

- Executing the regional memorandum of understanding that will formalize the institutional relationships of all regional e-government participants.

- Expanding on the numbers of subscribers and shared applications including private partnerships. ■

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other cities are in the process of connecting to the I-Net to receive shared services.

The subscribers pay for the shared services and applications based on fees that are set by the regional task force.

What's next?

The major tasks that must be completed to make the system operational over the next two years are:

- Completing the Regional Institutional Network (I-Net), which physically connects the major county and city (Fresno and Clovis) government centers, as well as subscriber agencies. The network will include all 15 cities, as well as other special districts.

- Establishing a common regional portal that will be used by all residents and agencies in the region, regardless of locale or jurisdiction, to electronically access the system and seamlessly obtain the basic services and related financial transactions. This task is in the vendor selection and implementation phase.

- Creating regional content and links

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