

Online Journal of Space Communication

Volume 2
Issue 5 *Satellites Address the Digital Divide*
(Fall 2003)

Article 13

June 2021

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William Stowe

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Recommended Citation

Stowe, William (2021) "Technological Issues: The Citizen Initiated Performance Assessment (CIPA) Initiative through Wireless Technology," *Online Journal of Space Communication*: Vol. 2 : Iss. 5 , Article 13. Available at: <https://ohioopen.library.ohio.edu/spacejournal/vol2/iss5/13>

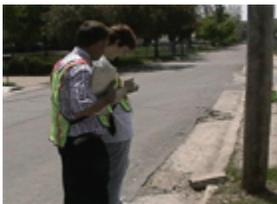
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The Citizen Initiated Performance Assessment (CIPA) Initiative through Wireless Technology

William Stowe,
City of Des Moines, USA

Abstract

Many governments, including my own that serves a population of about 200,000 Central Iowans, have been reluctant to invest in technologies supporting e-government services. The operating assumption for this reluctance is that the "digital divide" delivers the benefits of e-government to the wealthiest and often most educated citizens, effectively diverting resources to constituencies traditionally less reliant on government services than the poor who are often left on the down side of the "digital divide". While "digital divide" considerations are and should continue to be a focal point in deciding allocation of scarce financial resources supporting technological improvements, reallocation of resources to bridge the "digital divide" should be a countervailing consideration in debates about the impact of e-government. Without doubt, this use of technologies to communicate citizen requests for service is more direct and arguably more effective than the process available to more affluent residents, effectively using technologies to turn the digital divide to the advantage of those less likely to have ready access to their own technologies.



Recently, the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation funded a "Citizen Initiated Performance Assessment" (CIPA) in about 10 Iowa cities and towns, ranging from Iowa's capital city, Des Moines, to rural Carroll, a farming community of about 10,000 residents in Western Iowa.

The heart of the project empowers neighborhood leaders with technologies to categorize concerns, photograph them, and communicate service requests based on these concerns to the city's government. For example, citizens can make government immediately aware of troublesome problems like broken sidewalks, concerns about "junk" cars in backyards, or trees infested with crows. These can be photographed, along with specific location data and transmitted to city halls for review by appropriate staffs and, as necessary, used to generate work orders in response to these citizen initiated service requests. (See photo above of residents cataloging a concern with deteriorated curbs.)

In the context of Des Moines, Iowa, two neighborhoods representing differing demographics and assumed needs-the Gray's Woods Neighborhood (a remote, forested relatively low income residential neighborhood much of which is located in flood plain) and the Indianola Hills Neighborhood (a middle income relatively densely populated area with both residential and commercial properties)-were selected as the bellwethers in assessing CIPA within the City of Des Moines' 50 or so recognized neighborhoods.

The technologies supporting CIPA in Des Moines involves issuing 2 iPAQ H3850 Color Pocket PC's (64 MB of SDRAM memory and a 8MB storage card) with an attached Nexian Digital Camera CF Pack-Nexi Cam (with a 32 MB flash card for photo storage) to each neighborhood. CIPA neighborhood activists [How are these people selected - from church groups or other sources?] then pass the technologies among one another to document concerns, in turn, are communicated with city governments, who, in turn, apportion these inquires to appropriate service providers (e.g., sidewalk concerns to Public Works inspectors, nuisance concerns to Community Development enforcement offices and speeding concerns to Police Departments). (See iPac photos below.)



While currently downloading this data through direct connection to the city's network based customer service systems, wireless connectivity is available by placing a wireless card in the iPAQ and connecting via radio to the city's network.

Conclusions

Although CIPA technologies have only recently been delivered to citizens in Des Moines, Iowa, this use of technologies is illustrative of options available to others worldwide. No doubt the same process that transmits requests for services from remote neighborhoods in a medium sized Midwestern American city, could also be used in far more distant environments to communicate needs nationally to responsible governments. This model offers an extraordinary opportunity to reverse the "digital divide" by empowering citizens with the greatest need for services a direct and unimpeded link to service providers with a record upon which delivery metrics can be applied. In so doing, governments can be more precisely held accountable for their service delivery, or, placed in a unique position to explain better their perceived unresponsiveness. Perhaps through leveraging technologies, the democratic ideals of a better informed citizenry and responsive governments can be more than the platitudes of high schools civics instructors; moreover, the presumed disenfranchisement of the poor by increasing

use of technologies to request and assess government services may be negated and, through appropriate interventions and resource allocation, reversed.

Bill Stowe is Public Works Director of the City of De Moines, Iowa. He holds a JD, the Masters of Engineering in Professional Practice, University of Wisconsin - Madison, a MLIR and a BA. His email address is wgstowe@ci.des-moines.ia.us.

For more information on CIPA see:

- http://www.ci.des-moines.ia.us/mayor_council/agendas/2000_as/blue/00-566.htm
- http://www.iowacipa.org/downloads/GFOAarticle_Citizen-BasedPM.pdf
- <http://www.extension.iastate.edu/Connection/2001Summer/citizen.html>