

Submitting Organization: Xerox Citizen Service Center  
Contact: Melissa Templeton, [mt.templeton@home.com](mailto:mt.templeton@home.com) or 703-868-5939  
Paper Name: Swimmers, Take Your Marks: Inviting Federal Agencies into the e-Government Pool  
Category: The Mandate for e-Government / Public Demand

## **Swimmers, Take Your Marks: Inviting Federal Agencies into the e-Government Pool**

*by Michael Piersa, Vice President and General Manager, Xerox Citizen Service Center*

e-Government – the use of modern technology, especially the Internet, to make basic interactions between the average citizen and his or her government more convenient – is giving new buoyancy to the phrase “service to the citizen.” Across the country, those local and state governments brave enough to test the e-Government waters are realizing the benefits of providing online transactions and services to their citizenry. And their citizens are responding with a resounding cheer.

The e-Government wave has been gathering strength for some time now at the state and local level, and with an admirable degree of success. Now, as the general public begins to grasp the impact of e-Government and all of the benefits that come with it, all eyes are turning to the federal government to see how e-Government will be effectively implemented on the federal level.

We’ve all heard about the benefits of e-Government; if you’re lucky, you’ve already experienced e-Government firsthand with your own state or local government. There is an easily defined totality of savings to government and the community in terms of public budget, environmental impact and convenience for the citizen.

And what about the price of providing these online services and conveniences? If implemented properly, e-Government can pay for itself. This means no impact on the government budget or the tax dollar, but an astronomical impact on the savings to the citizen. Less drive time, less time off work, less time on hold means a minimized “life-cost” to the very people government strives to serve.

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Today, still in its early stages, e-Government is taking hold where it makes the most immediate impact on our daily lives – on the local and state level. We all interact with our local government and even our state government much more frequently than with our federal government. However, that does not make the federal government exempt from the public demand for greater convenience and more timely, robust, and accessible services. The principal driver of the larger e-Government movement, from City Hall to Capitol Hill, is not frequency or savings. The driving force behind e-Government is **public demand**.

### **Meet the Demand**

The demand for better – faster, easier, more effective, more convenient – access to government is not new. It has always existed, since the creation of the first government. The difference between the first democracies and today's is both a matter of size and interaction - what the Internet promises to restore. What also is new is the public expectation that government will satisfy that demand at all levels using available and pervasive technologies like the Internet. (According to “E-Government: The Next American Revolution,” most Americans think e-Government should be a priority of the new president. And sixty-five percent favor the appointment of an e-Government czar.)

The emphasis has to be on service, regardless of the level of government. Any government that ignores new technologies and a new way of life espoused by the people risks being perceived by the public as archaic and uncaring. Our leaders need to move quickly to embrace the e-Government initiatives in place today. Moreover, they need to expand upon them to create a government that is truly in tune with the needs and demands of its people.

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### **Learn from the e-Government Pioneers**

It will be important for the federal government to expand upon its traditional role as a leader to whom state and local governments look for guidance, to create a more reciprocal relationship. In the new world of e-Government for citizens, the federal government can learn a lot from state and local governments, where a paradigm shift in government relationships with citizens is already occurring. Citizens today are being empowered to "serve" themselves on their own timetable, as opposed to acquiescing to the government's timetable by waiting in line for permits or filling out forms to meet various government requirements.

A case in point: the City of Rochester (NY) recently unveiled an e-Government initiative that allows citizens to pay water bills and parking tickets online via the Internet. Using the same solution, professional electricians can obtain electrical permits online.

This input into the city's databanks, powered by Xerox Corporation technology, results in cost and time savings for both citizens and government. Government workers no longer have to re-input information, which, until now, has been a common hurdle for most government bill-paying services. This technology can be applied at all levels, with numerous applications, and can empower government to get back to its basic mission – serving the people. And those very people, freed of serving government at the state and local level on government's timetable, will increasingly demand the same consideration of the federal government. History demonstrates time and again that once a freedom is established at any level, it is almost impossible to take back – and the people will always choose freedom in the end.

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### **Use the Tools at Hand**

At this stage in the exciting evolution of e-Government, federal agencies can take advantage of lessons learned by those who have gone before. The technologies, processes and solutions already have been developed to maturity and are readily available – just waiting for the guiding hand of a national government responding to the needs and demands of its citizenry.

Government doesn't have to start from scratch, and they shouldn't go it alone. By partnering with industry, the federal government can experience low-risk development while enjoying the high-payoff promise of properly executed e-Government.

e-Government gives us the tools to give every citizen better access to democracy. Governments at all levels need to step in and take a leadership role in defining the ways in which e-Government impacts the lives of all of us. Take a few lessons from the bold strokes of local and state governments, let industry show you the best gear to use, and dive right in. We're all cheering for you and ourselves, and nobody's going to let Uncle Sam drown.

*Mike Piersa is vice president and general manager of Xerox Citizen Service Center, the division of Xerox Corporation dedicated to partnering with state and local government to make true E-Government a reality. He can be reached at [michael.piersa@usa.xerox.com](mailto:michael.piersa@usa.xerox.com).*