Civic Tech Fuels U.S. State and Local Government Transformation

Sponsored by: Accela

Ruthbea Yesner Clarke
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WHAT IS CIVIC TECH?

Civic technology merges technology innovation with civic purpose. Using civic applications, open data platforms, and a range of other technologies, civic tech connects citizens, tourists, and businesses with government services and government workers to make civic engagement and government infrastructure more effective. Tech-savvy government leaders, nonprofits, and civic start-ups are creating new technology-enabled services that make it easier for business to work with government, for citizens to fulfill their civic obligations, and for government workers to do their jobs. These services improve:

- Access to, and transparency of, data and program and policy performance for public decision making

- Ways in which citizens and residents can provide direct government feedback

- Visualization and mapping of data for better analysis and decision making

- Voting and legislative processes

- Community action and crowdsourcing initiatives

- Citizen-facing services and the back-end processes that support them

Civic Tech Is Growing

Civic technology is a rapidly growing area of investment for state and local governments, funding organizations, and start-ups. U.S. state and local governments are expected to spend $25.5 billion on external IT in 2015, and civic technology is expected to make up almost one-quarter of that spending, or $6.4 billion.[1] Civic technology spending is also expected to grow 14 times faster than spending on traditional IT from 2013 to 2018.

The Knight Foundation, one of the biggest sponsors of civic technology in the United States, reports that the number of organizations dedicated to civic technology grew 23% from 2008 to 2013 and that private and philanthropic investment in these organizations between 2011 and 2013 amounted to $431 million.

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[1] *IDC FutureScape: Worldwide Smart Cities 2015 Predictions*, December 2014

Transforming Citizen Services

This investment is driven by a confluence of factors, starting with the changing expectations of citizens. Citizens want to have more direct contact with government, but many expect the interactions to be technology based and as simple and friendly as consumer applications and services. Citizens do not want to renew their driver's license, apply for a permit, or make a complaint with an in-person visit or public meeting during specific hours. Citizens expect to access information and services 24 x 7 and via the Internet using smartphones, tablets, or computers. They want to interact with other citizens over community affairs or to provide feedback and opinions using social networks, online forums, or mobile applications.

As a result, more and more technology vendors are offering solutions to address these expectations and provide innovative and high-quality tools at lower cost options. Government leaders should look to turnkey civic technology solutions that can link back-end processes to citizens and make services more convenient and quicker to process. For example, solutions that support applying for licenses and permits online or via mobile devices are more convenient and provide quicker results to citizens as well as faster fee collection for government agencies. Solutions that support mobile field workers for zoning and inspections get businesses up and running more quickly, which means they are hiring workers and generating revenue more quickly as well. Open data platforms can spur the creation of new start-ups and contribute jobs to the local economy.

Another way for state and local governments to access cutting edge services at affordable rates is to look to social innovation and accelerator programs. Accelerator, or incubation, programs offer start-up applicants seed funding and in-kind services as well as expertise from more established industry leaders. For example, Tumml is an urban innovation accelerator program focused on supporting social entrepreneurship in urban environments and has a grant from the Blackstone Charitable Foundation and sponsorship from Accela. Tumml is an example of one resource to find start-ups focused on specific need areas.

This is a tremendous opportunity for civic leaders because there are more solutions in the market that share the purpose of better meeting citizen needs in cost-effective ways that also make it easier for government workers to perform with continually limited resources. Civic technologies provide the platform and tools to fuel government transformation, and this journey is just beginning.

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Global Headquarters

211 North Union Street, Suite 105
Alexandria, VA 22314
USA
571.296.8060
Twitter: @IDC
idc-insights-community.com
www.idc.com