

HIGH SPEED INTERNET

E-GOVERNMENT AND CIVIC ENGAGEMENT



OVERVIEW

High speed Internet allows citizens to participate in civic life more fully and interact with government agencies with greater ease. E-Government solutions can make navigating government services more efficient, improve the quality of services and increase transparency. Although e-government does not replace the quality of services delivered in-person by skilled government employees, especially to vulnerable populations, high speed Internet enhances public employees' abilities to supplement these services in important ways. As federal, state and local governments increasingly rely on the Internet to provide information, forms and services for various government programs, the need for universal, affordable access grows. And with civic participation only a click away, high speed Internet can lower the barrier between citizens and their elected representatives. The capabilities of high speed Internet to aid in everything from simplifying interactions with public agencies to expanding the possibilities of a participatory democracy are endless.

CURRENT CHALLENGES

Although an increasing number of government services and opportunities continue to be offered online, the absence of universal, affordable high speed connections and the high cost of computers keep many Americans from engaging e-government. Those without computers or access to broadband also miss out on opportunities for digital civic engagement, like participating in online campaigns or partaking in community websites. Poor coordination between federal, state and local government institutions makes establishing appropriate e-government services across administrative and geographic boundaries a challenge. Reservations about inadequate security and privacy safeguards undercut public confidence in e-government applications involving sensitive personal information.

BENEFITS OF BROADBAND TO E-GOVERNMENT & CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

- Government forms completed online from Web sites open 24 hours a day are faster, cheaper and consume fewer resources than hard copies delivered through regular mail.
- High speed Internet allows a wide range of government services to be completed electronically including business filings, review of Medicare prescription drug options, real-time web-displayed public transit updates, and online car registration.
- The rapid download of video and data lets citizens tap countless resources on government and political issues, be they local, national or international.
- High speed Internet allows citizens to communicate with their elected officials or other candidates through e-mail, online petitions and even social networks.
- Two-way video streaming opens public government meetings to interact with faraway constituents in geographically dispersed areas.
- Online social networks allow citizens to connect with like-minded individuals to organize politically, participate in online campaigns, and make their voices heard.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Investment in research and development of e-government initiatives should include an emphasis on improving system compatibility across federal, state, and local governments.
- Access to affordable high speed Internet must be extended to under-served communities so more Americans can participate in civic life online.
- Efforts to develop online government training programs should be expanded and government digital outreach measures must be directed toward disconnected Americans unfamiliar with e-government.

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