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all for ONE

In a data-driven
world, agencies
can't afford
to go it alone
anymore.



When Hurricane Katrina struck the Gulf Coast in 2005, the response and recovery were considered a disaster for government. There was no clear chain of command. Communication broke down between federal agencies and state and local responders. And many of the hurricane's victims, left homeless and broken by the disaster, felt as if they had nowhere to turn.

When Hurricane Sandy struck the Northeast and Mid-Atlantic in 2012, it was a different story. The Federal Emergency Management Agency deftly shared weather information and aerial photographs collected by the Civil Air Patrol among federal, local and nongovernment responders. Those responders moved swiftly to the most affected areas. Relief wasn't immediate for the storm's victims but it arrived—and there were numerous routes to request it, online and in person.

Part of the transformation was a credit to legislation passed in Katrina's wake that established clearer lines of authority during disaster response and a significant boost in FEMA's funding. Another share of the credit, FEMA Chief Information

Officer Adrian Gardner says, goes to a renewed focus at FEMA and its partners at the federal, state, local and tribal levels on sharing data and sharing burdens and on being equipped with the communications and information technology that allows them to do that.

When Gardner talks about the future of emergency response, he focuses less on the complex web of federal, state and local agencies gathering data, charting responses and providing services and more on the data itself. That includes information about the resources each town in

and around a storm's path can offer, the latest aerial photography and data on power grid damage supplied by the Energy Department and local utilities.

When that data can be shared quickly and clearly and when all the partners in an emergency can communicate about it just as seamlessly, he says, the recovery

will look less like individual efforts from an alphabet soup of agencies and more like a unified response that's left government silos behind.

"You've got to have good decision support mechanisms, and that's all about getting data into



The New Jersey fusion center (above) coordinated interagency response to Hurricane Sandy in 2012, a marked contrast to the confusion after Katrina (below) in 2005.



the right hands and making it data you can quickly consume,” he says. “It can’t just be a barrage of data the decision-maker has to wade through to make an informed decision. We need quick, simplified data that has the same look and feel across the board.”

SANDY’S LESSONS

Disaster response seems like a natural fit for this concept of a unified government, driven by data and heedless of agency divisions. Storms are superhuman forces after all, barreling obliviously over geographic and bureaucratic boundaries.

There are lessons in Sandy, though, that observers say could make government faster, cheaper and more accessible even when Mother Nature isn’t pounding at the door.

Among those lessons: The old bureaucratic barriers that separate one agency from another are less important than the lines that bound different parts of the human experience; data collected by one office can be immensely useful to another only if they can share it; and sharing is easier for government and citizens alike if they can speak just once rather than many times.

These lessons are already bearing fruit in some places.

The Education Department, for instance, has partnered with the Internal Revenue Service to offer a tool that automatically loads parents’ income information into the online Free Application for Student Aid so they don’t have to search through old files and enter it manually. New York, Los Angeles and other cities have launched 3-1-1 mobile apps that serve as single points of entry for citizens reporting everything from graffiti on their streets to a missed trash pickup. And small business owners can now visit Business USA—a one-stop site for government-backed financing, exporting guidance and other resources—rather than search a slew of agency websites.

Advocates are looking for something more, though—that point where the divisions between agencies and levels of government become hardly perceivable to citizens and where the data and resources of one agency are instantly accessible for others to rely on and learn from.

The upside to this process for most citizens is simplicity. When different parts of government are sharing data and coordinating management there is less bureaucracy on the citizen side.

Treating Citizens Like Customers in Colorado

As a private sector technology executive, **KRISTIN RUSSELL** watched companies become adept at tracking customers from one division to the next and learning everything they could about them along the way.

When a warranty expired, a product was recalled or a superior product came out, they knew just who to contact. And they knew the best way to contact them.

When Russell became Colorado’s chief information officer, she saw something different. State agencies weren’t competing with anyone, so they had little incentive to offer great customer service.

This wasn’t just bad for citizens. It was costly for government too. One agency spent \$4 million annually on postage. If citizens could opt for email-only contacts statewide, that figure could be reduced significantly, Russell says.

Russell and Colorado’s Chief Technology Officer Sherri Hammons started planning for a governmentwide customer relations management system that could recognize citizens from one agency to the next, save their addresses and personal information, and alert them to services they might qualify for.

An early version, called PEAK, offers a unified portal for medical, welfare and child support services and links to the state’s new online health insurance marketplace. Russell hopes to expand the PEAK concept across Colorado’s 22 agencies so citizens can interact with government once and be done.



The benefit is twofold for government. First, there are cost savings when agencies spend less time doing the same work. An April 2013 report from the Government Accountability Office found 17 areas in which agencies were duplicating each other’s work or overlapping unnecessarily, equating to billions of dollars in wasted money.

“We’ve got to do this because basically we’re running out of money,” says Tom Davis, director of government relations with the consulting firm Deloitte and a former Republican congressman from Virginia and chairman of the House Oversight and Government Reform Committee.

“Given the deficits we have, we can either make some significant cuts to programs, we can significantly increase taxes or we can make significant reforms in the way we deliver services,” he says. “There’s not enough money anymore to waste it on inefficiencies.”

Second, there’s the issue of complexity. Globalization, technological innovation and a slew of other trends have made government’s problems more complicated and interconnected in the past 15 years, says Mark Forman, the first administrator for e-government during the George W. Bush administration.

Forman offers the example of the sav-

ings and loan crisis during the late 1980s. The response to that crisis was managed mainly by an ad hoc organization known as the Resolution Trust Corporation.

By comparison, the government response to the 2008 financial crisis required coordinated efforts by agencies ranging from the Treasury Department to the Transportation Department as well as the ad hoc Recovery Accountability and Transparency Board.

“We went through a period where issues were simpler,” Forman says. “The organizations that dealt with them were fairly parsimonious and easy to architect. That started to change in the ’90s because the complexity of problems grew exponentially as the world became interconnected by the Internet and other things. It’s not just a technological trend; it’s a social trend that includes technology.”

GOVERNMENT LEANS IN

Davis and Forman are part of a working group sponsored by the American Council for Technology and Industry Advisory Council, known as ACT-IAC, which is focused on reforming government operations and technology around broad themes like health care and education as well as life events, such as entering the workforce, having a child, launching a business or retiring.

One Agency Isn't Enough

Nothing is simple in the modern world, especially for government. When the nation was reeling from a savings and loan crisis in the 1990s, the government response mostly fell to the newly created Resolution Trust Corporation. When a bigger financial crisis hit in 2008, numerous agencies had to work together on the response. Here's a short list:

TREASURY DEPARTMENT

Oversaw the Troubled Asset Relief Program and generally guided the government's response



Former Treasury Secretary ▲ Henry Paulson and TARP Investment Chief James Lambright

RECOVERY ACCOUNTABILITY TRANSPARENCY BOARD

Created to oversee President Obama's stimulus program to boost the economy

TRANSPORTATION DEPARTMENT

Managed the *Cash for Clunkers* program ► aimed at boosting new auto sales



CONSUMER FINANCIAL PROTECTION BUREAU

Was created to guard consumers from the sort of predatory loans that helped spark the financial crisis

FEDERAL DEPOSIT INSURANCE CORPORATION

Helped shore up failing banks and other lending institutions

FDIC employees after transfer of IndyMac Bank to FDIC control ►



The project, called Smart Lean Government, aims to transform not just how federal and state agencies share data and software systems but how those agencies are organized.

New parents, for example, must engage with myriad federal and state agencies to get their child a Social Security number, record vaccinations, claim the child as a dependent on their tax forms, and apply for insurance subsidies or other benefits. Under the Smart Lean model an interagency group might share those services and the data they collected across the federal government and with state and local agencies.

For the child's parents it might be as simple as filling out a TurboTax-like responsive form at a one-stop government website. For the local, state and federal agencies that consume that data, however, it would require a complex web of people and computer systems to work together in a new way.

State departments of motor vehicles might also be able to track and collect unpaid parking tickets issued by cities and counties when they provide new car registrations, and state tax agencies might share basic data about residents who move from state to state.

DRIVEN BY DATA

In addition to making it easier to provide services, sharing this data across different levels of government could also yield insights at a more granular level, making government policy less of a blunt instrument, says Edward Montgomery, dean of the McCourt School of Public Policy at Georgetown University.

By gathering, sharing and analyzing the full universe of data, government could micro-target its policies, offering different flavors of education grants or tax credits from state to state or even county to county, he says.

"There's a gold mine of information already in existence that we've simply not tapped into because we don't have systems that allow us to share it between government agencies," he says.

Local school districts, for example, could access data collected by the Education, Treasury, Commerce and Labor departments; officials at those departments could cooperate to give schools better guidance on what students should learn to compete in a new marketplace; and data collected by those school districts

could filter back up to educate state and federal agencies about how they should allocate grants and other resources.

Montgomery envisions a future in which public policy is targeted at citizens and regions in much the same way Google and Facebook target ads. The government's push to reduce unemployment, for example, would be different in New Orleans than it is in Skokie, Ill., based on a trove of data from federal agencies, local unemployment offices, environmental conditions and even residents' job-related Internet searches. The response to climate change would be similarly diverse based on local environmental factors.

WHO PAYS?

While the greatest benefit to this sort of cooperation and data sharing is the money it would save, cost is also one of the greatest barriers. This conflict is playing out now in an executive-legislative battle over the Digital Accountability and Transparency Act, known as the DATA Act, which would require standard coding across government for spending data on grants and contracts.

The goal of the legislation—sponsored by Sens. Mark Warner, D-Va., and Rob Portman, R-Ohio, in the Senate and Reps. Darrell Issa, R-Calif., and Elijah Cummings, D-Md., in the House—is to make it easier for data crunchers inside and outside government to compare and analyze data across agencies, spotting waste and duplication. It would also make it easier for grant recipients at the state and county levels who deal with different computer systems and different agencies—in some cases, even to manage similar grants.

In a leaked memo from January, the White House's Office of Management and Budget suggested a pared-back bill that would only require agencies to release their spending data in machine readable forms, saving the cost of moving to standardized software systems for entering that data, but making it more difficult to plumb cross-agency data for insights.

The problem is that while a standardized system would benefit the government at large, that change wouldn't initially benefit agencies, which would be burdened with the cost of buying, implementing and training on new systems, says Forman. Agencies also would likely have to put some of the funding parsed out to them by Congress in shared accounts to administer

such a system, putting them at risk of paying out more than their fair share.

Warner has said he won't roll back the requirements in his original bill.

FINDING A BALANCE

Some say too much unity could interfere with agencies' individual missions, especially when it comes to sharing information and resources among states or between states and the federal government.

This problem has diminished in recent years as developers have become adept at building both uniformity and flexibility into IT systems, says Kristin Russell, chief information officer for the state of Colorado.

Russell is helping manage a federal grant to build a unified unemployment benefits system for a consortium of states including Colorado, Arizona, Wyoming and North Dakota.

The system will look different in each state and will reflect the idiosyncrasies of how each one manages unemployment benefits, she says. But the portals' technological nervous systems will all be the same and they'll be housed, along with the data they collect, in the same computer cloud.

Russell, who was formerly a vice president at the technology company Oracle, hopes this model of sharing costs, technology and data when people move across state lines will spread to other states and

The trick is sharing enough agency systems and data to get the big picture without losing flexibility, says former Congressman Tom Davis.



spheres of government. As unemployment systems become outdated, she says, states will be able to hook into the consortium system for less money than building their own new systems.

"I really feel that states are sort of the perfect ecosystem for this type of innovation," Russell says, "because they're big enough to have a pretty profound impact, but not so big that they get tied up in a lot of regulation and red tape."

Others are skeptical of sharing technology across too broad a swath of government. For an example of consolidation's dangers, they need look

no further than HealthCare.gov, the Obama administration's online health insurance marketplace that directly serves insurance seekers in 36 states. The system provides underlying data to 14 states and the District of Columbia, which built their own marketplaces.

HealthCare.gov nearly imploded upon launch, shutting the majority of insurance seekers out of the system before they could enroll in a plan. It took about two months of major repairs before the system was meeting performance expectations. Several state marketplaces have also suffered from performance problems, some of them caused by back-end data-sharing with the federal marketplace, but they've generally performed better than HealthCare.gov.

"I'll just say in retrospect, I'm glad there wasn't a single federal exchange," says Tom Davis, the former House Oversight Committee chairman.

That's not just Monday morning quarterbacking. Davis opposes "one size fits all" solutions that don't account for differences in health care, education and other issues among states, but he also opposes what other Smart Lean advocates call "too many sizes." The trick, he says, is sharing enough systems, data and responsibilities to get a look at the big picture and learn from it, but not so much that government loses flexibility.

"The private sector thrives on data to make smart decisions and to compete in the marketplace," he says. "Government has to do the same thing. Otherwise we'll be flying blind and legislating by anecdote and that hasn't proved to be very effective."

Setting Data Free

Government agencies aren't the only ones looking to pull vital intelligence out of public data. The private sector is also getting into the game, using open data streams supplied by the government.

85,000

Open government data sets posted to Data.gov

500

Companies profiled by New York University's GovLab that use open government data to fuel part or all of their operations

\$3T

◀ Potential value of open data yet to be exploited, according to McKinsey and Co.