

Governor's Office Onboarding Guide: Information Technology Systems

Overview

Information technology (IT) has come to play a vital role in governors' offices. It supports efficient office operations; provides access to information needed by the governor and the governor's staff for policy development, legal and legislative analysis and state government management; and facilitates communications with key stakeholders and constituencies. Accordingly, it cuts broadly across governor's office functions—from constituent services to scheduling to legislative tracking—that call for a wide range of IT applications.

Incoming administrations should give priority to determining what the governor's commitment will be to using IT, whether and how the IT system already in place can be adapted to the needs and objectives of the new administration and what additional IT capabilities are required. The steps that follow should include establishing an information systems/information technology policy; defining system requirements and developing a dedicated budget for information technology needs; setting a realistic timetable for the implementation process; managing the procurement process; acquiring, adapting and documenting systems, databases and applications; providing user training; and operating and maintaining the system securely.

A key objective of this guide is to emphasize the importance of a well-integrated and effective information technology system on the work of the governor's office. It provides a general overview to help raise questions and assist governors and their staff with determining the IT needs that will shape how they establish and maintain their IT systems.

Objectives and Applications **IT Objectives**

Information technology can substantially enhance the capability of governors to respond to growing demands. The office computer network serves as the nerve center for the governor's office. It can enable the office to more effectively monitor and manage many of its critical operations and the critical operations of other state offices. The IT system also can be used to reach out to—and communicate with—constituents and stakeholders.

Governors are reliant on the latest technology to bring them timely and accurate information and connect their offices with government agencies and private sector organizations and the resources they provide. In particular, governors are taking advantage of social media to interact with the public.

IT Applications

Computer applications within governors' offices may include methods for managing appointments, constituent services, correspondence, scheduling, press and communications, legislative relations, legal counsel, office management, project management and policy analysis.

One critical step to creating tailored IT solutions and applications is to identify common tasks and data requirements of different functional areas. Laying out this groundwork—even if it is just through initial documentation of common needs—allows for IT systems to be planned cohesively and possibly integrated at some point, either when upgrading equipment and networks or when the office incorporates newly emerging technology into pre-existing systems. The common tasks and data requirements of different functions in the governor's office are outlined below.

IT Objectives and Applications in the Governor's Office

An effective information technology system must address the needs of the governor's office.

Given the major roles and responsibilities of governors and their staff, the office

- Enhance the capability of the governor's office to manage critical
- Provide timely and accurate information for essential functions; and
- Serve as a vital communications link with constituents, other branches of government, and key organizations.

Appointments

The management of appointments to boards and commissions requires the ability to catalogue governor-appointed positions on state boards and commissions and solicit, track and fulfill applications for board and commission vacancies.

Correspondence and Constituent Services

Many governors' offices have merged the correspondence and constituent services functions. But whether these functions are managed separately or together, technology-facilitated growth in the volume of inquiries has made it a necessity that governors' offices use advanced technology to receive, track and respond to incoming requests.

Scheduling

Scheduling staff need appropriate IT tools to manage the governor's schedule, including responding to incoming scheduling requests and tracking the governor's engagements.

Communications

Responsibilities of communications staff include holding news conferences, preparing press releases, writing speeches and developing promotional materials and events to highlight the governor's agenda and accomplishments. Communications directors will want to ensure that the governor's office is equipped with the right technology to promote the governor's agenda and accomplishments.

Legislative Relations

Legislative relations staff track priority bills through the state legislature, as well as review and respond to proposed legislation, functions that can benefit tremendously from the speed and accuracy that IT affords.

Legal Counsel

The legal counsel must be able to access and interpret state and federal laws, rules and regulations and monitor legislation and pending litigation, all of which are enabled by information technology.

Policy Analysis

Policy staff need to be able to access, organize and analyze data relating to public policy issues. The data they require are typically found with the aid of information technology in-house, at all levels of government or via membership organizations.

Planning and Preparation

After identifying the objectives and applications of the IT system, the next step is to decide how and by whom the system will be organized and managed.

Determine the Governor's Preferred Practices on Information Technology

One critical element in establishing the IT system in a governor's office is a signal from the governor and his or her senior staff members of their commitment to automation and the degree to which they will

personally use aspects of the office's information technology.

The governor's management style, preferred practices on information technology usage and plans for organizing and operating the governor's office will have a significant effect on the office IT policy.

Understand and Evaluate the Current System

For many years, information technology in governors' offices tended to start anew with the election of a new governor. However, as this technology has become more all-encompassing and complex, there is a growing tendency to transfer systems and applications from one administration to another. As a result, staff likely will want to begin with a clear understanding of the current system and its strengths and weaknesses as new systems requirements are being studied and documented.

Besides documenting and assessing system requirements at the beginning of an administration, the governor's office must periodically review the adequacy of the IT systems in place. Staff should recognize that computer investments can be extremely costly; more and faster computer equipment does not necessarily guarantee an automatic increase in productivity. Uncoordinated information technology growth can have a negative impact on office operations.

Transfer Data from One Administration to Another

Special attention should be given to how IT systems are transferred from one administration to another. There is much data on current systems that will not typically be made available to a new governor. However, there are a number of areas in which the transfer of information can improve the continuity of services. For example, it would be helpful if information on the functions, members and vacancies on boards and commissions were to remain available.

Develop Integrated Office Systems

Many major applications in the governor's office

require the collection of contact information (name, address, telephone number). However, in most governors' offices, separate computer applications are used for each of the major office functions, such as appointments to boards and commissions, correspondence and scheduling. Information from one computerized function often cannot be shared easily with other applications or functions because they have been designed at different times with different data needs in mind.

Because these systems often cannot interface or share information, there is a large amount of duplicate data in various office databases. Much of the same data has been re-entered more than once simply because the databases are not compatible. This contributes to a staggering amount of extra work and to data errors and inconsistencies, especially if such duplication occurs hundreds, or even thousands, of times over the course of an administration.

Some governors' offices have solved this problem by developing integrated office applications, which allow these offices to redesign their applications with the needs of the entire office in mind. The underlying concept of integrated systems is the ability to minimize data entry and allow data to be used for a variety of purposes. This kind of re-engineering of office computer processes has improved the efficiency and effectiveness of entire office staffs. In one case, a governor's office designed an integrated system that shares information about the people who deal with the governor's office for a variety of reasons. Once a person's name is in the system, that data can be accessed from all of the major office functional areas. This approach integrates data from board/commission appointments, constituent mail and services and scheduling and into one "people database" for the governor's office.

Establish a Comprehensive Records Management Policy

Public records increasingly are created and maintained electronically. Too often these electronic files are not well organized and become difficult to use. While it is possible to address issues of records management at almost any time during an

administration, there are significant advantages to doing so as early in a term as possible. Establishing a set records management policy will ensure that the governor's office and administration-wide recordkeeping are compliant with state law and freedom-of-information requirements.

Seek Expert Input on IT System Goals and Priorities

To help the governor and senior staff members develop an effective office IT system, it can be useful to identify a project manager and seek input from a committee of potential users.

The role of the project manager is fundamental to developing computer and IT system standards. Although it is not necessary for the lead staff member to be a computer expert, the project manager must have a basic understanding of computer systems, an enthusiasm for the job and the ability to work with software application experts. It is essential for the person serving in this role to have a thorough understanding of the office structure, functions, workflow and interaction among units within the governor's office.

Another useful approach to developing the IT system is to establish a committee of potential users. Such a group would be sensitive to design requirements for individual applications and to existing computer characteristics and how they might fit into a new or upgraded system based on the most current technology standards. The group could work with programmers on the development and review of specifications for software.

Enlisting the cooperation of these staff members also can provide additional insight into the goals and key IT priorities of the different functions within the governor's office. In particular, functional staff are well suited to identify problematic issues with the current IT operating system, raise questions about effective capacity and identify technology challenges plaguing particular computers, databases or systems that might not be readily known throughout the office.

Implement IT Systems

Once the goals and priorities for the office IT system have been set, the next step is to proceed with the implementation and management of information technology.

The nature of required IT management activities is closely linked to the size and complexity of the systems to be used in the governor's office. However, the basic tasks that must be accomplished should remain fairly constant, including:

- Establishing an information systems/information technology policy;
- Defining system requirements and developing a dedicated budget for IT needs;
- Setting a realistic timetable for the implementation process;
- Managing the procurement process;
- Developing systems, databases and applications;
- Documenting the IT system;
- Developing and providing user IT training; and
- Operating and maintaining the systems securely.

Establish an Information Systems/ Information Technology Policy

In many states, the governor's office computer systems have developed in a piecemeal fashion. As a result of rapid advances and the growing role of information technology, it is important for each governor's office to establish a clear policy on IT systems. This policy should include:

- Standards for equipment capacity and compatibility with existing systems;
- Information system/information technology priorities and timelines for acquisition;
- Guidelines for system access and system security;
- Documentation standards;
- Procurement guidelines; and

- Relationship and compatibility with other state agency computer systems.

Define System Requirements

Once a general IT policy has been established, the most critical task is to define the purpose of the system. To ensure that system requirements are adequately defined and understood, it is necessary to provide a clear description of overall office functions and tasks along with a description of the types of controls and products that will be required. It is particularly important to develop an understanding of each function in its broadest context so that provisions can be made for future enhancements or additional applications.

First, the existing office systems (whether automated or manual) should be carefully documented. Second, the additional functions or capabilities that may be needed by the office should be described. It is also important to determine the necessary interactions with existing or proposed functions in other segments of the governor's office as well as other state agencies. This is essential to developing an integrated approach and creating useful and customized programs and applications. Once again, input should be solicited from all relevant sources and specific needs should be defined prior to purchasing hardware or software. Finally, a budget should be developed reflecting the hardware, software and staff needs that have been identified.

Set a Realistic Timetable for the Implementation Process

Timetables are critical to maintaining focus on the objectives and tasks associated with establishing and refining IT systems, as well as ensuring that staff members who are involved in that process fulfill their responsibilities on schedule. At the same time, IT project managers should account for the possibility that there will be unforeseeable glitches and delays that call for timetable flexibility.

Manage the Procurement Process

There are at least three critical elements to the management of the procurement process. First, staff involved in procuring new computers, software

applications and other equipment must understand and comply with all state laws and rules. Some of the desired equipment may be available under existing pre-negotiated contracts, or there may be requirements for review by central staff agencies. Second, the process must be managed to ensure that separate acquisitions do not lead to incompatible systems. Third, the process must ensure a broad distribution of proposals and the capacity for a competent technical review. Other states' successes and pitfalls can be a valuable source of information regarding upgrading current systems to take advantage of new features and useful tools. Most states are willing to share information on the computer applications and IT equipment installed in their governor's office.

Develop Systems, Databases and Applications

Prepackaged software applications do not always provide the flexibility and performance required by a governor's office. Many governors' offices rely on their own IT staff to develop needed applications. Offices may also draw on the expertise of other state agencies and external contractors to meet development needs.

Particular attention must be given to the development of analytical and management systems. The development of applications to meet these needs requires that careful thought be given to the structure of the governor's office and state government and information requirements associated with the governor's agenda.

Document the IT System

It is critical that IT systems be sufficiently flexible and adaptable to meet the rapidly changing needs of a governor's office. Documenting systems during their development helps to ensure that flexibility/adaptability. Without such documentation, even minor changes may require massive reprogramming or re-entry of hundreds of thousands of pieces of data.

Because there is often little continuity in staffing between administrations, it is also critical for

complete documentation of existing systems to be provided as a transition resource for every new governor. The need for the system to be transferred to a new governor also should be considered when developing databases.

Develop and Provide User IT Training

The success of any IT system depends on staff who are comfortable with the equipment and knowledgeable about its operation. A comprehensive technology training program should be ongoing and targeted to serve the particular needs of all staff. Technology instruction should take into account the unique needs of new staff members as well as returning staff. It is also important to provide constant updates and reviews of shortcuts and new technology available to expedite routine office processes.

Training may be provided in several ways. Knowledgeable staff members, state IT departments and external contractors all may be enlisted to provide training. Staff members can provide useful instruction both formally and informally on general office applications, but training for specialized applications, programming skills and systems administration is usually best left to state training programs and external training organizations.

Operate and Maintain the System

Large and complex systems have greater support requirements and usually necessitate a dedicated support staff. Governors generally have four options regarding organizational responsibility for IT systems operations:

- Assigning technology responsibilities to existing staff;
- Using state IT agencies;
- Using a service bureau, vendor or other consultant; and
- Establishing professional IT staff positions within the governor's office.

Identify the Key Technology Players

It is critical during the transition into office to make an early determination of the staff resources available

to assist the governor's office with evaluating the existing IT system, securing computer networks, merging/ updating database systems, and identifying other office technology needs. If adequate staffing is not already available for these tasks, senior staff must identify additional resources as needed. Governors' offices commonly rely on a mix of outside contractors, state agency resources and their own IT professionals to fulfill these roles:

- **State agency staff and outside professionals.** Many states have central information technology agencies that can provide network administration, computer support, and development services. The governor's office also can contract with outside service providers for almost any unfilled computer needs. The governor's office should consult with the central technology agency before contracting with an outside service provider. Most governors' offices rely on a combination of these resources.
- **Governor's office IT staff.** Some governors' offices hire their own IT professionals to meet routine needs and daily operational requirements.

Even when full-time IT staff are working in the governor's office, state information technology agencies and external contractors can be important supplementary resources. A governor's office does not have a constant demand for many IT functions such as wiring networks and large-scale applications development. State agencies and external contractors can supply staff for large development projects, work on unique needs that occur intermittently and provide access to specialists who may be too expensive to employ on a full-time basis.

Ensure System Security

Security is an essential component of the IT maintenance process. Security concerns can include network breaches; safeguarding data that is downloaded, uploaded or accessed remotely; and eliminating computer viruses and spam derived from

untrustworthy Internet sources. Just as governors' staff should receive IT training on a fairly consistent basis, it is necessary to keep staff aware of precautions and security measures they should take to reduce the vulnerabilities of their computers and the whole network system.

Techniques and Tools

It is important to identify the technological tools that will be used in the governor's office to carry out general office-wide tasks as well as specialty systems needed for different units. All together, these resources provide a comprehensive system that—when maintained properly—improves the ability to conduct the day-to-day operations of the governor's office.

Databases and Other Management and Tracking Technology

Databases and other management and tracking technology help maintain and process a wealth of information used by governors' office. Schedulers depend on this technology to manage, update and share the governor's schedule; handle acknowledgements, acceptances and regrets, as well as keep track of necessary advance work prior to a given engagement. Specialized reports, calendar printouts and event briefing materials are also typically generated with computer software applications.

The appointments process benefits from software applications that help catalog existing and open positions on boards and commissions by providing a means for maintaining information on board and commission composition, appointee terms and current vacancies. They also enable gubernatorial staff to classify appointments into manageable categories, analyze the qualifications of prospective candidates to meet geographic or other criteria and manage the many steps required in the detailed process of making appointments.

Data management and tracking technology has become vital to managing incoming correspondence and constituent service requests. Databases,

scanning and document storage applications, autopens/ signature devices and other software all help manage the workload. These methods must be designed to log and acknowledge inquiries, whether they be made in person or by phone, letter, email or online application; classify inquiries and route them either within the governor's office or to government agencies for review and response; track inquiries, including monitoring response and follow-up; and implement quality control measures.

Online databases facilitate research conducted by policy, legislative and legal staff. Most states have developed public legislative tracking systems, and some offices also have developed internal databases to manage the bill review and approval process, including the preparation of standard transmittal letters and official filing requirements.

The Governor's Website

A well-designed and well-maintained official website can be an asset to any governor and provides exceptional opportunities for the governor to reach a large segment of the public. New governors will need to determine who is responsible for website development and maintenance.

Governors' websites provide information about state government benefits and services as well as links to state agencies, making them primary portals to the state executive branch. Many governors' offices now provide online forms to receive applications for appointments to boards and commissions and documentation of applicants' qualifications; constituent requests for assistance, greetings, proclamations and the like; scheduling requests; and comments on policy and legislation.

It is important to determine how long content will remain on the website. Tools exist that are dynamic and posts can have an expiration date. Maintaining a comprehensive online presence through the governor's website is a crucial function.

Blogs and Social Media

Governors' offices are taking advantage of social media and the speed with which this technology

enables information sharing and interaction. Governors are using new media to host statewide town halls via webcast, chat with students in classrooms, reach new audiences through Facebook, give short updates on Twitter and post videos and photos from events to YouTube and Flickr. All of these mechanisms are crucial to the governor's communications function and provide the governor with many forums with which to answer questions, explain policy positions or deliver an important address to constituencies in real time.

Staff use of social networking sites should be consistent with applicable state, federal and local laws, regulations and policies, including information technology security policies; office and statewide acceptable use policies; and records retention and disposition schedules.

Each form of social media has its own unique terms of service (TOS) that regulate usage of that particular form of media. Any employee using social media on behalf of your office should consult the most current TOS in order to avoid violations. If the TOS contradict your state's procurement regulations or other state regulations or policies, you will need to decide whether use of such media is appropriate. Consider involving legal counsel in this decision.

Email

Managing the volume of email messages sent to the governor is a challenge for most governors' offices. It is important for the governor to establish a policy for handling incoming email messages, including what types of email messages are to be answered and tracked.

Because email records are generally treated as public records and subject to disclosure, another key priority is to establish clear policies regarding the appropriate use of email and its retention or disposition. This means understanding the current disclosure guidelines for state government and modifying if necessary any holdover procedures (from the transition period) for archiving mail. In general, government email systems should not be used for nongovernmental purposes. Most email

users tend to assume a certain level of privacy and adopt a more informal tone with electronic correspondence. Because of these factors, governors' staff should be made aware of the extent to which their email may be or become public record. Depending on the purpose of the correspondence, email may be of transitory value or retained permanently as part of office records. The state archival or records management agency can be a helpful resource to learn best practices for managing and archiving the governor's office email records.

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