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Guide to efficiency tools for local governments



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Local governments today face a challenging reality that can often feel like walking a tightrope. Common issues include:



Budgetary Restrictions

The tighter the budget, the less room for error. Communities have to be smarter with their budget to make it go further, particularly in areas in which there are fewer ways to generate revenue or citizens are more sensitive to tax increases needed to accommodate growing demands. Budgets aren't doing a lot of increasing but citizens' needs are.



Lack of Resources

No matter the size of the community or the government that serves it, every organization has its own set of challenges. Large communities face considerably more assets and citizens to oversee, though their budget and workforce may not be as proportionate as needed. Small communities tend to face fewer resources, but their governments are still expected to provide the same level of effective service. Workforces for small communities may be much lower than larger communities, which creates more windshield time and less wrench time.



Aging Infrastructure

All infrastructure is aging, but lack of funding pushes repairs beyond their due date. Aging infrastructure breaks down more frequently, resulting in repair that costs more and requires more time to fix. Infrastructure that's out of order not only means fewer opportunities for commerce, but also unhappy citizens, which no government wants.

These factors mean that those working to serve their citizens struggle to help their communities thrive. Not to mention, they often drive maintenance and public works departments from proactive maintenance into reactive maintenance mode. This adds stress and extra cost to departments. The unintended consequence is a lack of capital planning that leaves communities blindsided by major repairs with not enough available funding to cover the cost.



Citizens are also embracing technology at breakneck speed, which elevates the expectation for their government to do so as well. There are a lot of options available for government organizations to integrate technology into their operations to improve efficiency, without having to invest a lot of time or complicate processes. Implementing a few simple tools can help your crew work efficiently with prioritization of work, allow administrative officials to have clarity into the work being performed, assist department leaders with budget and full-time equivalent (FTE) planning, gain insight into employee performance, and manage capital planning and equipment life expectancy. Not to mention, the right technology can be utilized to justify greater budgets and ultimately improve citizen satisfaction and effective service.

Here are a few of the technologies local governments today are using to dramatically improve their service delivery and productivity:

1 | Work and Asset Management

Whether your government organization is large or small, a computerized maintenance management system (CMMS) is useful for the reports and history it provides because data is the linchpin of being able to illustrate work and justify budget requests. A system is helpful because of its ability to track data and readily provide information. That information helps reduce the struggle of trying to manage a variety of equipment and assets spread across the entire community. Having a system to track all the work you do enables you to have a better understanding of:

- Daily, weekly and monthly workload
- Preventive versus reactive workload
- Backlog of work
- Asset and equipment history
- Labor hours and costs
- Contractor hours and costs

In addition, a CMMS's ability to facilitate effective reporting, visibility and efficiency aids in the pursuit of knowledge retention. As more and more municipality personnel retire from the workforce, their experience and information goes with them. A CMMS allows governments to document history and ongoing information so this impact isn't felt as hard.

When looking for a system to manage your work and assets, make sure to go with one that is compatible with mobile devices. Paper documents and spreadsheets don't cut it anymore, especially for those who work in the field more than the office. Investing in a mobile system can transform any organization's operations by allowing employees to work from anywhere, dramatically saving time and money and increasing customer service.

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The most important thing we have gotten out of our CMMS was the ability to search our historical data. By looking at our work history, we can identify the areas of greatest need, which let us know if upgrades are called for. If any of the guys have to address a situation with a citizen, having records is helpful because we can tell them how many calls we've had about an issue and give them the history. That's a huge advantage for them because they like to be informed when responding to the public.

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City of Dunnellon, FL

2 | GIS Mapping

Speaking of mobile operations, utilizing geographic information system (GIS) mapping technology is a must for governments today. GIS mapping makes operations exponentially more efficient, so governments can collect data in the field, tie it to assets on a map or in a facility and gain more detailed, real-time reporting, building a repository of historical data.

Public Works and Utilities is typically the most visible department to citizens because they directly interact every day. Community members rely on water and roads regularly, so when something fails, governments go into reactive mode to remedy the situation quickly and return usage to citizens. Having effective management tools for these areas means better communication between

officials and citizens. It also enables a department to be able to report accurately and provide visibility, as well as foresee challenges and work preventively to minimize issues for communities.

Coordinating work between employees or departments who cover a large area is much easier with a program that lets you manage things geographically. GIS tools make it easy for employees to pull up their list of waiting work and see them sorted by proximity to where they are or by priority to decide what to tackle next. The power of using a GIS tool to visualize, analyze and interpret data and then make decisions is incredibly valuable, all while reducing paperwork and administrative overhead.

Historically, GIS software has been expensive and complicated, limiting its use mostly to governments supporting large population communities. Today, the introduction of cloud-based GIS tools has opened this

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We have to submit our numbers to the state for biennial inspections. Our GIS tool has made this whole process more efficient. Employees used to have to worry about keeping up with paperwork, making sure everything was kept clean and dry, and giving that information to the administrator. Now, they use a tablet which lets us capture real-time data as they go. When a job is completed, crews don't have to worry about data entry or paperwork. It's cut out two steps of our reporting process.

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City of Sanford, NC

technology up to governments of all sizes because it's now more cost-effective and user-friendly than ever. Whether in the office or the field, everyone has an understanding of what work is waiting and can get realtime updates to optimize workflow and movement around the community. Citizens and stakeholders can also participate. A GIS-centric application today is essential for increasing crew efficiency, planning and proper maintenance of assets.

When considering a GIS solution, look for mapping capabilities that allow you to manage inside operations and outside operations in one seamless, centralized place. For smaller communities, this means not having to have a different set of tools for facilities vs. field assets. Everything is visible and manageable in one solution. For larger communities, for larger communities, having one centralized solution provides a single repository for data that can be easily accessed for reporting and dashboards.

3 | Energy Management

Energy management is the second largest line item for most governments, and it's often the area that sees as much as 30 percent wasted spending. An energy management solution allows governments to track data that empowers them to make smarter, more sustainable decisions surrounding energy usage. An energy management solution allows governments to:

- Facilitate better planning for capital investments
- Protect their organization in performance contracts
- Meet regulatory requirements
- Use energy more efficiently to improve citizen
- Perception and community relations
- Fund capital investments
- Share success with reduced spending

No government of any size can afford to bleed money when it comes to energy. With the right tools, governments can see exactly which assets have become money pits and make data-based decisions about repair versus replacement measures. They can also gain further insight into utility bills, noticing any improper billing or when and where their spikes are so they can get their energy usage down to a science. With this added visibility, leadership buy-in becomes easier when it comes time to prioritize and fund projects, and organizations are able to find realistic ways to improve sustainability. When choosing a system, don't settle for less than cloud-based. Not only will you never have to pay for server maintenance, but your data will always be secure and easily accessible, so you never have to worry about losing it.

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This really reduced our plan review times, and it helps make the City of Maricopa a great place to build and do business.

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City of Maricopa, AZ

4 | Citizen Engagement

Citizens are why governments exist. Infrastructure, water, energy, transportation — it's all to protect, grow and fulfill our communities. That's why communication between a government and its citizens is vital. A citizen engagement application can provide an excellent bridge between community and government members and helps officials receive powerful feedback used in decision making.

Having a feedback mechanism from your citizens allows for more eyes in the field to find and report issues in a timely manner. “One of the advantages of having a citizen app, you've got an extension of city staff. Citizens are everywhere. They'll notice if a street light is out, they'll notice if a tree limb is down, they'll notice if you've got a pot hole, and they'll tell us right away. So now what we can do is we can target where we need to go fix these things and not have someone roaming around looking for things going on. It makes things more efficient for public works staff,” says Michael Hamer, Assistant IT Manager for the City of San Leandro. Some technology systems have one-on-one communication, meaning you can gain necessary information from your citizens like a burst pipe and automatically notify them when a job is complete without the negative impact of social pile-on. Whatever you choose, make sure the engagement tool you go with is mobile accessible.

Can't justify implementing a citizen engagement application? Consider a GIS or work and asset software that includes a robust citizen portal and works well on mobile devices.

5 | Capital Planning

Thinking about creating a five, ten or twenty-year capital expenditure forecast seems daunting. Having the data to make the correct choices is crucial. New technologies have made it easier than ever to create a plan that is accurate and properly prioritized. For communities with aging infrastructure, it's especially important to be looking ahead to what capital expenses are on the horizon and planning for them now. It can be difficult, if not impossible, to squeeze a large, unplanned expense into the budget when it comes up by surprise.

The benefits of all of these tools come down to the same thing — the ability for anyone to access the data they need from wherever they are. Breaking down data silos and enabling employees to get the information they need empowers them to make better decisions about what needs to be done and greatly improves their productivity. Weaving these types of technologies into operations enables governments to help their community thrive and succeed.

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I'm the one that purchases our cellular and mobile devices, and I'm getting a lot more request for those. So I know that public works staff are using those devices. It allows them to stay in the field longer, because they can do their work there. They don't have to come back to the office and put it in. They can spend that extra hour in the field doing work because they've got the ability right on their phone to update it.

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City of San Leandro, CA



Sources

1. Caroline Cournoyer, "Two Cities Test Tinder-Like App to Encourage Citizen Engagement, Government Technology. <http://www.govtech.com/applications/Two-Cities-Test-Tinder-Like-App-to-Encourage-Citizen-Engagement.html>

About Brightly Software

Brightly, a Siemens company, is the global leader in intelligent asset management solutions, enables organizations to transform the performance of their assets. Brightly's sophisticated cloud-based platform leverages more than 20 years of data to deliver predictive insights that help users through the key phases of the entire asset lifecycle. More than 12,000 clients of every size worldwide depend on Brightly's complete suite of intuitive software – including CMMS, EAM, Strategic Asset Management, IoT Remote Monitoring, Sustainability and Community Engagement. Paired with award-winning training, support and consulting services, Brightly helps light the way to a bright future with smarter assets and sustainable communities. For more information, visit brightlysoftware.com