

Better Services, Better Government



The Federal Government's E-government Strategy

November 2002

Better Services, Better Government

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FOREWORD



Innovation and efficiency are two key drivers for a more competitive Australian economy. Technological advances are reducing the “tyranny of distance” and are drawing more Australians into the global economy. Information and communications technology (ICT) and resulting online capabilities such as the Internet provide the foundations for the transformation of the operations of government, business and households.

In the *Investing for Growth* policy statement released in 1997, the Prime Minister, the Hon John Howard MP, announced a framework for growth and dynamism in the Australian economy. It focused on building

competitiveness and accelerating economic reform. In addition, it set an ambitious target for federal agencies and departments to have all appropriate services online (via the Internet) by December 2001. This has paid huge dividends. In February 2002, at the World Congress of Information Technology held in Adelaide, the Prime Minister confirmed that the 2001 target had been met.

The federal government is now well advanced, in global terms, in the use of the Internet to provide government services and programs online. However, the Coalition Government recognises that we must not rest on our laurels as other governments are also making good progress. It is vital for the federal government to continue to be a leading edge user of ICT, because it impacts directly on our competitiveness and therefore our national prosperity.

Federal departments and agencies must move beyond the first stage of Internet applications to an even more advanced stage – the era of fully-fledged e-government – in which the application of new technologies to government services, information and administration demonstrates sustained benefits to citizens, business and government itself.

This strategy maps out the policy framework within which federal departments and agencies will go about achieving that objective. The responsibility for overseeing future developments, particularly involving those where collaboration between agencies is required, will rest with the newly established Information Management Strategy Committee (IMSC) of Secretaries and CEOs from key departments and agencies. The IMSC will be supported by a Chief Information Officer (CIO) Committee.

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In this new era of e-government, citizens are at the core of the process. Australians will not need to know about the structure of government in order to be able to deal effectively with it. The community will also benefit from improved convenience, as many federal agencies will in effect be available to the public 24-hours-a-day, seven-days-a-week. Another benefit will be enhanced transparency of government decision-making processes and operations. What we will have is a more integrated, coordinated and efficient approach to information and services across all service channels.

The impact of e-government on the business community, particularly small business, in saving time and slashing red tape, illustrates its transformative potential. Firms are now able to complete many government administrative requirements online, whether it be form-filling, seeking access to business assistance programs, undertaking a transaction or submitting taxation returns.

Federal departments and agencies will continue to identify and implement online services which demonstrate real benefits. Increasingly, business will also be able both to win government business opportunities and to receive payments online. In these ways, many of the efficiency gains from e-government will flow directly to the business bottom line.

In short, e-government is about better services and better government for all Australians.

SENATOR THE HON RICHARD ALSTON

Minister for Communications, Information Technology and the Arts

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This strategy, *Better Services, Better Government*, maps out the next phase of the federal government's drive to move from placing government information and services online to more comprehensive and integrated application of new technologies to government information, service delivery and administration.

Better Services, Better Government has six key objectives:

- achieve greater efficiency and a return on investment;
- ensure convenient access to government services and information;
- deliver services that are responsive to the needs of individual Australian households, business and civic organisations;
- integrate related services;
- build experience, user trust and confidence in the use of new technologies; and
- enhance closer citizen engagement in policy formulation and processes.

E-government is the term that describes the use of available and emerging technologies to create seamless, responsive and citizen-focused government for the benefit of all Australians. The quality and efficiency of government services and information will improve to create broader and faster access to integrated, flexible and more customised services. In this way, e-government contributes to Australia's future national prosperity.

E-government involves a fundamental re-thinking of how technology can improve the very process of government. It will transform the design and delivery of government services and the relationship with citizens. Agencies will be able to embrace new approaches, which will allow greater flexibility to respond to government priorities and demands for new services.

E-government also involves departments and agencies focusing on the use of new information and communications technologies to deliver programs and services to 'customers' online. But it goes beyond that. An effective e-government strategy also entails maximising the use of the Internet to engage more effectively with members of the community as 'citizens' and 'stakeholders'.

In short, e-government creates the means to put the needs of customers, stakeholders and citizens in the foreground, as the delivery of online services is shaped by their requirements. It represents government that is citizen friendly, transparent and responsive.

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The Internet should be seen for what it is – a key strategic tool that the federal government and the Australian community can utilise to achieve real and concrete benefits. Indeed, how we manage that process will underpin to a considerable extent our future prosperity in the information age.

Given the reach of the federal government to all parts of the Australian community, federal departments and agencies have a key role to play as both users and demonstrators of the utility of online service delivery. Internet use does not create benefits automatically, and effective application of new technologies for innovation and productivity growth requires a coherent strategy.

This e-government strategy seeks to harness the benefits of more widespread use of, and familiarity with, online services by the broader Australian community, as well as by government itself.

SETTING THE SCENE

The Prime Minister, the Hon John Howard MP, in his “Centenary of the Australian Public Service Oration” (Institute of Public Administration of Australia, June 2001) stated:

We live in an increasingly complex and interdependent environment and there is no doubt that, in recent years, issues have more consistently reached across traditional portfolio boundaries. This trend will continue.

...Senior Public Servants and their staff will need to find ways to minimise any limitations associated with what could be described as the ‘Silo effect’. A methodology for rapid and effective integration of work units from traditionally unrelated departments will need to be further refined to achieve broader government objectives.

The *Better Services, Better Government* strategy takes up these challenges.

Traditional ways of providing services to the public are being challenged.

E-government creates new interfaces between government and the community, and is transforming public administration and driving new options for public sector reform. E-government also creates opportunities to align policies and programs better, reduce duplication, improve policy development processes and revolutionise program delivery.

In the *Investing for Growth* policy statement released in 1997, the Prime Minister announced a policy framework for growth and dynamism in the Australian economy. As part of the statement, he set an ambitious target for federal departments and agencies (referred to throughout as ‘agencies’) to have all appropriate services online (via the Internet) by December 2001.

The *Government Online* Strategy, released in April 2000, helped guide and assist federal agencies working towards meeting this target. Federal agencies responded to the challenge of placing all appropriate services online. In February 2002, the Prime Minister announced at the World Congress on Information Technology in Adelaide that this target had been met.

According to a number of independent reports, the Australian Government’s use of the Internet to provide services and programs online is already amongst the world’s best.

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International e-government benchmarking reports

Accenture, in its 2002 report *e-Government Leadership – Realizing the Vision*, ranks Australia fourth of 23 countries assessed against a range of criteria measuring e-government maturity. The previous year Australia was ranked fifth.

According to a report published in June 2002 by the United Nations, *Benchmarking e-Government: A Global Perspective*, Australia ranks second to the United States of America in terms of e-government development.

The World Market Research Centre and Brown University, in their *Global e-Government Survey* of September 2001, rank Australia third of 196 countries.

Federal agencies are at the end of the first stage of government electronic service delivery spelt out in the *Government Online Strategy*, which mainly involved the migration of existing information services to the online environment. The next stage is e-government.

What is meant by the term e-government? It involves government agencies delivering better programs and services online, more efficiently, through the use of new information and communications technologies. E-government also harnesses the use of these technologies to improve government administration as well as enabling more effective engagement with the community.

Better Services, Better Government maps out the next phase of the federal government's drive to move from simply placing government information and services online to a more comprehensive and integrated e-government strategy.

Through the innovative use of available and emerging technologies, e-government will deliver more seamless, responsive, efficient and outcome-focused government.

KEY OBJECTIVES

Better Services, Better Government has six principal objectives.

Achieve greater efficiency and a return on investment

Investing in the development of effective e-government in Australia is vital. There are strong efficiency grounds for government improving policy development, program operations, service delivery and access to services. That will involve restructuring traditional processes, matching technology investments to these changes and managing projects to ensure an overall return on investment.

Ensure convenient access to government services and information

From the user's perspective, e-government should enable citizens and business to deal with government on a vast range of matters, any time of the day or night, without having to understand which part of government is providing the service they require.

People will no longer have to travel to join a queue at a government counter for the majority of services or wait for their phone calls to be answered. This will make accessing government services more convenient for people living in rural or isolated areas and people who, for a variety of reasons, find access to government offices in working hours difficult.

There are four key service channels for Government services and information: online, over the counter, on the phone and by mail. The integrity of these channels will be maintained both within each channel and between channels enabling the integration of service delivery to ensure a consistent experience for the customer. The technology convergence in which telephony, computing and mass media communications are merging will represent a particular challenge. Nevertheless, it is anticipated that demand for online services will quickly surpass other service channels as a result of the huge convenience online service delivery offers.

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Deliver services that are responsive to client needs

In this new era of e-government, outcomes for citizens, business and government itself are the drivers. Technology will not determine the service – rather, better information management and improved business processes will be the means used to tailor the delivery of government services to meet the needs and demands of citizens.

E-government makes it possible for an individual to access government information and services that are relevant to them through a single entry point. Whether starting a business or having a baby, individuals should receive targeted information about their entitlements, their responsibilities and sources of additional information. In short, this ability for “individuation” ensures government services are tailored and clustered to meet specific needs.

The key benefits of e-government for the business community are similar to those for individuals. These include:

- saves time and money;
- improves access to government;
- enhances convenience;
- facilitates dealing with government (eg. making payments or bidding for government tenders online); and
- makes available more integrated services.

The power of e-government to transform how government works is illustrated by the way it saves time and cuts red tape, particularly for small business, through streamlining processes.

Saving time

Take the case of a recent initiative of the Australian Taxation Office (ATO). In the paper-based system for Business Activity Statements, the ATO needs to do extra work in around 20 per cent of cases. This entails re-keying, double-checking and where necessary contacting the taxpayer directly. Where the statement is lodged electronically, the extent of extra work drops dramatically, with errors in only 2 per cent of cases. Not only do online users get faster notification if there is a problem; in many cases they get this in real time online. This represents a significant saving in time for all concerned.

With e-government, there will be even greater access to federal government agencies, many of which effectively will be open for business 24-hours-a-day, seven-days-a-week. Small business owners or employees will no longer have to drive to a government office to fill in a form. They will be able to complete many more government administrative requirements online, whether it be filling in forms, accessing business assistance programs, carrying out a transaction or submitting tax returns.

Key Objectives

Moreover, small business will also increasingly be able to win government business opportunities and to receive payments online. In this way, many of the efficiency gains from e-government will flow directly to the business bottom line.

Cutting red tape

The Business Entry Point is part of the federal government's commitment to make it easier for business to comply with government requirements. It does this by providing free online services and information for Australian business 24-hours-a-day, seven-days-a-week.

The website enables Australian businesses to carry out transactions for taxation compliance and license application more conveniently and simply online. A unique feature of this website is that it includes information and services from federal, state and territory government agencies, as well as some local councils. It is continuously being refined and progressively offering more transactions online in response to Australian business needs.

According to information recorded on the website:

- nearly one million applications for an Australian Business Number have been made online via the Business Entry Point;
- approximately 35 per cent of all ABN/GST applications are made online;
- around one million searches are conducted on the Australian Business Register each month;
- the Business Entry Point has provided over 30 million page impressions since early 2000; and
- more than 90 per cent of the traffic coming to the Business Entry Point relates to online transactions.

www.business.gov.au



Getting people "on-line" rather than "in-line" has been a catchcry for those pushing for greater use of the Internet. What e-government will mean is if you prefer to operate online, you can avoid having to visit a government counter or wait for your phone call to be answered.

The Australian Government's main entry point www.australia.gov.au and the associated portals are an important early implementation of citizen and business-centric e-government.

Integrate related services

It is not uncommon for individuals or businesses to have to carry out several separate government transactions to achieve a single outcome. E-government will develop new, common infrastructures across agencies so that related services can be 'bundled' and presented as a single service at the point of delivery, even though several agencies are involved in the background.

This practical way of providing services will dramatically reduce red tape, for example by removing the need to fill in multiple forms requiring similar information.

One highly integrated service, which involves not only state and federal governments but also the business sector, is the Australian JobSearch service and the Job Network.

Finding a job

Australian JobSearch (AJS) provides a better way for job seekers to search for a job and for employers to publicise job vacancies. It aims to give all job seekers the best possible access to the largest choice of jobs.

The national vacancy database contains:

- every job listed with every Job Network service around the country;
- jobs advertised in some national newspapers;
- jobs listed in the Australian Public Service gazette;
- jobs lodged directly by employers using the advertise a job service; and
- jobs from RCSA (Recruitment and Consulting Services Association).

Australian JobSearch also:

- helps users find Job Network Service and New Apprenticeships Centres;
- has a listing of work for the dole projects and seasonal work available around the country; and
- provides links to the 'Harvest Trail', 'SkillSearch' and 'Job Outlook' sub-sites.

JobSearch currently has more than 50 000 vacancies, and is one of Australia's leading employment sites with more than 800 000 Internet page accesses and two million touch screen page accesses per day.

www.jobsearch.gov.au



The screenshot shows the Australian JobSearch website interface. At the top, there is a navigation menu with links for Job Seekers, Employers, RCSA, IT, Defence, Government, and Graduate. Below the menu is a 'Job Location Finder' section with a map of Australia and a table showing the number of jobs available in each state/territory.

STATE/TERRITORY	JOBS
New South Wales	17455
Queensland	13161
Victoria	11621
Tasmania	345
Western Australia	2077

Key Objectives

The fishOnline website is another example of a newly developed integrated service. It provides quick access to fishing and related information such as weather reports and online licence applications.


fishOnline

The Trials of Innovative Government Regional Services (TIGERS), a program administered by the National Office for the Information Economy (NOIE), in partnership with the Government of Tasmania, has established an online one-stop-shop for recreational fishing. It allows quick access to information on fishing policy, boating, weather forecasts, safety regulations and the environment as well as providing an online application facility for fishing licenses.

The fishOnline website demonstrates how the federal and state governments can collaborate to deliver integrated services for the benefit of the community. The fishOnline site is an effective model for future online integrated services.

TIGERS coordinated the development of fishOnline, with major contributions from the Commonwealth Bureau of Meteorology, the Tasmanian Inland Fisheries Service, the Tasmanian Department of Primary Industry, Water and the Environment, and Marine and Safety Tasmania.

www.fishOnline.tas.gov.au

A screenshot of the fishOnline website interface. The top section features the 'fishOnline' logo in a stylized font. Below the logo is a horizontal navigation menu with various links: Home, Fishing, Fish, Weather, Safety, Licensing, Boating, Tides, Information, Library, Get Involved, and Search. A search bar is located on the right side of the navigation menu, with a 'SEARCH' button and a magnifying glass icon.

An example of how more fully integrated services could be of benefit to the community is a coordinated government service following the birth of a child. Under e-government, a well-integrated service outcome will mean that families need not complete multiple forms required by different agencies, such as registration of birth, Medicare notification and application for family entitlements. Moreover, there are also internal efficiencies to government that flow from this process.

Improved integration of related services, policies and programs are core objectives of e-government. Priorities for action will be determined by making detailed assessments of typical customer needs, as well as the benefits for citizens and government itself.

Build user trust and confidence

Increasingly more government services are available and being used online. The convenience of online transactions is driving demand for more of these types of services. Trust and confidence in undertaking transactions online must underpin the continued uptake of these services. The foundations were laid during the just-completed *Government Online* phase, with its emphasis on privacy, security and authentication.

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E-government will take this further by ensuring that government transactions with individuals provide the appropriate level of authentication – that is, confidence in the identity of the other party to an online transaction – as part of an overarching framework, similar to the framework already developed for business. This will encourage users to deal electronically with government by minimising the risk of unauthorised access to their information.

Enhance closer citizen engagement

Government agencies can use the Internet to improve the transparency of government deliberative processes and to provide the opportunity for wider engagement with the public including through online policy information, feedback and consultation.

As people become used to more readily finding government information and conducting government transactions online, they will expect a higher level and quality of engagement with government. Agencies can capitalise on the tremendous opportunity offered by the Internet to improve their reach when interacting with the community, and when consulting on new policies.

There can be benefits to government policy and programs through public and external stakeholders taking a closer interest in its operations and policy development. Both can be strengthened by early and regular feedback from the community. The transparency of and confidence in government will be strengthened as it becomes clear that citizens' views are taken into account in decision-making processes.

Making it easier for customers and the community

Through Centrelink's Customer Services Online Project, customers are able, for the first time, to update their family income estimate via either the Family Assistance Office (FAO) or Centrelink website. Under phase 1 of the project, Centrelink delivered a service to allow customers to:

- prepare their revised family income estimate online via either the Centrelink or Family Assistance Office websites; and
- send their estimate to the Family Assistance Office via Centrelink's Secure Internet Messaging Service.

Phase 2 of the project has already delivered the family assistance estimator – a new service, accessible via either the Centrelink or FAO website, to allow potential customers to see what family assistance they may be entitled to and existing customers to perform 'what if' exercises. This phase also covers the implementation of the following additional online functionality for customers:

- family income estimate update online - an enhanced service to allow the customer to view their existing family income estimate, change their estimate and see how the change affects their rate of payment;
- payment details - a new service to allow customers to see what Centrelink and/or Family Assistance Office payments they have received; and
- e-mail address update - a new service to allow customers from all segments with access to the Internet to update their e-mail address.

BETTER SERVICES, BETTER GOVERNMENT: THE TASK AHEAD

Shared commitment, collaboration and agreed standards between agencies are the keys to successfully achieving the six objectives of e-government. This means collaboration among agencies on how information and services are presented, how business systems are developed and deployed, and how elements of e-government are planned and managed.

The newly established Information Management Strategy Committee (IMSC) of Secretaries and CEOs from key departments and agencies will provide shared leadership on multi-agency and whole-of-government information management strategies. It will oversee the development of policies, standards, specifications and guidelines for ICT, to support future interoperability as well as individual business solutions for agencies. As a leadership group, the IMSC will use its influence to leverage support for its approaches.

Reporting to the IMSC, the Chief Information Officer (CIO) Committee will identify strategic issues, address issues referred by IMSC and develop options for adoption and implementation of ICT at agency or whole-of-government level. This will include developing strategic architectures, standards and proposals for shared services. Through working groups, it will address specific issues and promote research and development, and knowledge sharing.

Collaboration across Australian jurisdictions is fostered through the operation of the Online Council. It is the peak ministerial forum across federal, state and local governments for consultation and coordination on the information economy.

Achieve greater efficiency and a return on investment

Improving efficiency

The efficiency gains of 'real time' interaction with government are far reaching. For example, a growing number of forms are being filled in online, saving business (in particular, small business) time and money. The extensive use of the Business Entry Point

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website also demonstrates that the business community recognises the benefits of government services delivered through the Internet. For example, over 40 per cent of the traffic to the Business Entry Point occurs outside normal working hours and at weekends.

The popularity of innovative government services, such as the Australian Taxation Office's electronic income tax return lodgement facility (e-tax), is another clear example of Australians embracing online services.

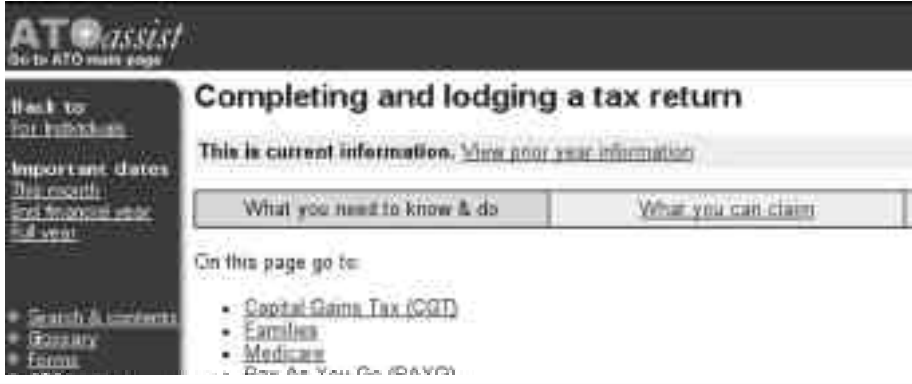
Paying tax online

e-tax is the secure way to lodge yearly income tax return over the Internet. It uses the latest encryption and digital certificate technology to ensure the security and authenticity of information sent to the ATO.

e-tax facts:

- By early November, more than 540 000 people had lodged their 2002 return using e-tax—already a 52 per cent increase on total lodgements last year;
- the ATO is processing almost 100 per cent of e-tax returns within 14 days with nearly 90 per cent processed within 10 days; this compares to a standard time of 42 days for paper income tax returns;
- the busiest time for e-tax downloads and lodgements is around 6pm to 10pm (ie outside of normal business hours); and
- an online survey of e-tax users shows that 94 per cent say they will use it again in 2003.
- the survey also shows that 56 per cent of e-tax users have not used e-tax previously.

www.etax.ato.gov.au



The screenshot shows the ATO website interface. At the top left, there is a logo for 'ATO e-tax' with the tagline 'Go to ATO with ease'. Below this is a navigation menu with links for 'Back to our homepage', 'Important dates this month, last month and 12 months ago', and '1-800-260-0928'. The main heading is 'Completing and lodging a tax return'. Below the heading, there is a note: 'This is current information. [View prior year information](#)'. There are two tabs: 'What you need to know & do' and 'What you can claim'. Underneath, there is a section 'On this page go to:' with a list of links: 'Capital Gains Tax (CGT)', 'Families', 'Medicare', and 'See All Your e-Tax Tools'.

Assessing return on investment

As with existing service delivery channels, it is essential that the costs and benefits of online services be measured. The direct costs are relatively easy to identify. However, benefits may flow in different ways and at different times. For example, a benefit may flow to businesses through a reduction in time needed to comply with government red tape, rather than back to the funding agency.

Better Services, Better Government: The Task Ahead

The measurement of benefits may involve a broad range of methodologies, such as the internal rate of return on investment, cost and benefit analysis and economic modelling of broader impacts.

There are clear benefits to be realised from a restructuring of the business processes of government. For example, the arrangements under the Job Network, underpinned by an e-business system, allow the contracted Job Network providers to deliver an improved service at a saving of approximately \$200 million annually over the former Commonwealth Employment Service network.

There are short-term cost issues associated with upfront investment required for online service delivery for federal agencies, particularly as they maintain multiple delivery channels. However, as more Australians take advantage of operating online when dealing with government costs are expected to fall. Assessing return on investment needs to take a multi-channel and multi-year approach.

The identification of significant issues related to investment in shared ICT infrastructure has been identified as part of an initial agenda for future strategic work by the IMSC.

Ensure convenient access to government services and information

Managing multiple delivery channels

One challenge of handling multiple delivery channels is coordinating integrated services across a range of technologies. This is not unique to government. Broadcasters and banks, for example, face similar issues. In fact many service industries are dealing with this fundamental 'convergence' change.

The federal government's initial approach to online service delivery has been similar to that of the corporate sector – a simple and direct translation of the existing activities that readily lend themselves to the online medium. Online delivery of programs, services and information must now be considered a mainstream service delivery channel. The online channel can no longer be an add-on, or an after-thought.

Critical to this is a recognition that 'online' cannot merely be 'overlaid' on existing service delivery channels. The online channel is not merely a channel for information and service delivery. It is a key driver of new approaches to information management that enables the integration of information and services.

The availability and increasing ease of use of the online channel creates the opportunity for existing service delivery processes to be rethought and remodelled. This is critical if efficiency objectives for government are to be realised. The alternative is merely to add another delivery channel and incur the additional cost.

Better Services, Better Government

Developing the next generation of discovery tools

Continuing the development of better 'discovery tools' represents a key commitment by the Australian Government, like other leading e-government nations, to deliver on the objective of convenient access to information and services for citizens.

There are a number of approaches to achieving convenient access, including presenting information and services by customer and subject groupings, audience, service type, region and life events. Australia.gov.au and other 'portal' websites are the first stage of bringing together information and services in logical groupings irrespective of which different agencies are involved. They represent the 'front end' of service delivery (or what citizens encounter as they search for a service).

Deliver services that are responsive to client needs

Establishing the basis for interoperable services

An agreed interoperability framework will enhance the capabilities of agencies to bundle related transactional services into integrated services that are responsive to client needs.

A high level of interoperability allows government and business processes to be undertaken between agencies and across sectors. This streamlines information management processes, reduces operational costs, and enables collaboration in other areas such as procurement and supply-chain management.

Through interoperability, agencies can combine disparate services and provide them as a single service from the citizen's perspective.

By supporting seamless public and private sector electronic delivery, and by reducing the need for SMEs to invest in multiple systems, interoperability promotes early realisation of the benefits that the online environment offers and delivers broad economic efficiencies.

Integrate related services

Building a common service delivery architecture and its governance

Architecture principles and standards operate to encourage the use of ICT to support business processes. They are a crucial foundation for delivering integrated services. For example, the standards that are set as a part of the network architecture will define the technologies to enable connections between government agencies and out to citizens and business. They may consist of facility designs, communication network components and protocols. Already there is cooperation among agencies in this area.

Better Services, Better Government: The Task Ahead

Applications can be designed, acquired, developed, or enhanced to enable data to be transferred and processes to be integrated with appropriate stakeholders. When designing applications or components of applications, flexibility now needs to be considered and the underlying technology infrastructure and applications should be scalable in size, capacity, and functionality to meet changing business and technical requirements. These collaborative efforts avoid unnecessary and expensive duplication.

The identification of significant issues related to investment in, and governance of, shared ICT infrastructure has been identified as part of an initial agenda for future strategic work by the IMSC. This agenda includes the development of a proposal for a new action plan for integrated service delivery, with an action and investment plan, for consideration by government.

Establishing governance structures to promote client responsiveness

Successful citizen-focused e-government depends on the ability to be responsive to community needs. In turn, this depends on governance structures attuned to how different groups of users react to service delivery initiatives. Many agencies already are working to foster a greater citizen focus. This requires a detailed understanding of the needs of each client segment and mechanisms to capture the reactions of clients—so that they can influence the direction of future e-government initiatives.

While it is important to gain an overall impression of how people react to e-government, experience in both the federal and state/territory governments indicates that detailed feedback is better achieved in response to particular initiatives, and is best gathered by targeting client groups.

An important first step to improving citizen focus is australia.gov.au and its associated subsidiary portal websites. Each portal is managed by a consortium of agencies, which work to meet the needs of the particular client segments for that portal. Each consortium therefore is best placed to introduce a detailed, client-focused approach to getting deeper and regular feedback from clients of e-government, and to respond to their concerns.

Developing an investment strategy

In the development of any whole-of-government infrastructure, the issue of future investment strategies must be considered. The development of client-focused services that cut across several agencies and are delivered through a common system will depend on a clear understanding of who pays, how the benefits are derived and/or distributed, and what period the investment is expected to cover.

More sophisticated service delivery may be difficult to progress without a coherent cross-agency investment strategy. More sophisticated online services can be funded through the expected business gains and efficiencies that can be achieved by replacing traditional service delivery channels, or through re-engineered back-end systems. However, the sources of such business gains are often uncertain and return on investment periods may be too long. The costs and benefits may also fall unevenly across different sponsors and recipients.

Better Services, Better Government

Investing up-front in innovative or higher-risk projects and funding cross-agency networks can be difficult under the existing budgetary system. In the current environment it is difficult to allocate funding for whole-of-government infrastructure projects.

Funding for ICT is currently provided on an agency-by-agency basis. This can add complexity to funding of common or shared infrastructure. The return on such investment does not always accrue to the spending agency. In other words, costs and benefits are not always aligned with the investor, and the timeframe for the return may be different.

Through the IMSC, the Government is reviewing these issues to remove any obstacles to an ICT investment strategy which addresses shared outcomes and outputs and shared investment, where appropriate.

Build user trust and confidence

Promoting confidence through website standards

The *Government Online* Strategy emphasised minimum standards and enablers for online information and services, since they are the building blocks for developing sophisticated online service delivery.

These standards and enablers remain relevant today. NOIE will continue to work with key agencies to promote good practice in implementing website standards and enablers across the Australian Public Service.

Agencies have made huge strides in implementing the various website standards (designed to maximise user confidence) and enablers (designed to maximise ease of use) for government online services.

Metadata

One of the success stories in this area is the inclusion of appropriate metadata on federal government Internet sites. The Australian Government Locator Service standard (AGLS) has been endorsed by all Australian governments and will be issued as a national standard by Standards Australia in late 2002. The use of the AGLS by agencies across jurisdictions has led to increased discoverability and hence access to relevant information by consumers and agencies.

What is metadata and why is it important?

Metadata can be defined as structured information created specifically to describe another form of data. It provides basic information such as the author of a work, the date of creation, description, key words, and links to related works. Metadata facilitates both the discovery and use of an agency's resources on the Internet. A simple way of describing metadata is to compare it to the card catalogues that libraries use to locate books. The adoption of a standard, the AGLS, across Australian jurisdictions means the discoverability of information is enhanced through the use of common metadata fields. To expand the library card catalogue example – all the cards in all the libraries would be the same basic format, so a user would have little trouble finding the book or information that they require, which ever library it resided in.

An October 2001 NOIE survey shows that:

- 89 per cent of federal agencies have analysed their resources for metadata tagging, the remaining 11 per cent are well on their way to completion; and
- Over three-quarters of agencies (77 per cent) have applied metadata to more than 70 per cent of their relevant resources. Of these, half have all of their resources retrievable. These percentages have both increased by approximately 15 per cent since March 2001.

The use of metadata is crucial to ensure easy widespread access to government information and services, either through portal websites or through commercial search engines.

Accessibility

Another important standard for government websites is accessibility. Agencies have made significant strides towards ensuring that their website content is accessible to all members of the community who can access the Internet. The aim has been to make sure that no one is disadvantaged by the format in which websites are displayed.

Authentication

Authentication assures the identity of the sender and receiver of online information, thereby building trust, security and confidence in conducting transactions online. The Government has made significant progress in electronic identification of businesses dealing with government through the Internet.

For electronic service delivery to move forward, there must also be practical and effective arrangements for ensuring the identity of individuals, which respect the existing privacy legislation in Australia. This means reviewing and standardising current methods of ensuring identity and, where necessary, developing whole-of-government procedures.

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A more robust system of authentication (that gives assurance of identity for both the sender and receiver of information) underpins future growth in online services and transactions by enhancing security and privacy for individuals.

Authentication of clients has been identified as being part of the initial agenda for future strategic work by the IMSC.

E-permanence

An important group of standards relate to the record keeping aspects of e-government activities. These ensure legal compliance and accountability for agencies as well as corporate memory and efficiency. The standards and guidelines for e-permanence that agencies must comply with are maintained by the National Archives of Australia (NAA).

Enhance closer citizen engagement

The Internet offers a tremendous opportunity for federal agencies to improve their reach when consulting with the community on policy issues. Broadly this is termed 'e-democracy' or online citizen engagement. There are two separate streams of activity associated with online citizen engagement at the federal level.

The first is how Parliament maximises its use of the Internet to engage with citizens, including parliamentarians' interaction with constituents, parliamentary use of the Internet, and electronic and Internet voting. The second activity stream focuses on public administration, viz how government agencies can use the Internet to optimal effect when engaging and consulting with citizens.

This strategy's focus is on the public policy and administration aspects of e-democracy, with work in this area mirroring developments taking shape in other jurisdictions.

Online citizen engagement enables a strengthening of the relationship between government and citizens and contributes to improved government decision-making, through consultation and feedback. As with other e-government initiatives, online citizen engagement needs to be an integral part of agencies' day-to-day business in order to be effective.

Federal agencies regularly consult with their stakeholders (representative groups, peak bodies, academics, and the community), and many have developed their own consultation practices and protocols using existing federal guidelines (eg. service charters, regulation impact statements).

There have already been some instances of federal agencies using online consultation. As online consultation becomes a more common tool for government agencies, a workable and consistent approach to facilitating online citizen engagement in the Australian Public Service will be required.

EFFICIENT APPLICATION OF TECHNOLOGY

Organising for e-government

Increasingly there are some whole-of-government requirements that cut across all agencies, some that bind a number of agencies together, and some that agencies can decide on an individual basis. The main objectives of shared architecture are to promote:

- interoperability between dissimilar systems;
- integration of services;
- application, data and infrastructure connectivity among and between new and legacy systems;
- flexibility and the ability to respond to change; and
- re-use rather than re-invention.

Governance is critical to this e-government environment as government increasingly focuses more on the life and business events of its citizens and as policy development and program delivery that crosses agency boundaries increases. Governance can be described as the people, policies and processes that provide the framework within which managers make decisions and take actions to optimise outcomes related to their spheres of responsibility. Governance frameworks for the 'shared' elements of systems may span a range of matters, from ownership of shared business systems, information ownership, infrastructure, and standards.

A key mechanism for achieving cooperation across federal agencies will be the IMSC, supported by the CIO Committee. The IMSC will provide shared leadership on multi-agency and whole-of-government information management strategies.

Issues that it will consider include:

- identification of significant issues relating to investment in, and the governance of, shared ICT infrastructure;
- development of a model for architecture, governance and investment for the secure business systems of the Commonwealth;
- development of a proposal for a new action plan for integrated service delivery; and
- authentication of clients.

Strategic R&D and knowledge management for e-government

Efficient and sustainable development of e-government in Australia requires much greater attention to knowledge and intellectual property as a shared resource among federal agencies. A whole-of-government approach to R&D, shared expertise, re-use of applications in other agencies, and knowledge management, is needed urgently to ensure the best possible return on the Government's investment in ICT.

R&D projects will result in trials, diffusion of innovation, and the development to 'proof-of-concept' stage for new e-government services and applications. This will shorten the time from development of relevant innovative applications to consideration of a full-blown business case.

Developing strategic ICT skills in government

To ensure the success of the next phase of electronic government, the skills base of the Australian Public Service needs to be broadened, particularly at general management levels.

The responsibility for promoting the online agenda goes beyond information technology managers – general managers in agencies need access to the knowledge and skills necessary to understand the business case for using the Internet for improved program and service delivery.

Sharing and re-use of assets

Agencies are already cooperating in the development of policies that cut across traditional portfolio boundaries. This involves addressing the issues of ownership of shared business systems and adoption of appropriate standards. It is important that there be further collaboration on ICT procurement both by leveraging the Government's collective buying power and by increasingly re-using valuable intellectual property across the Australian Public Service. Re-use of assets will be enhanced by greater commonality of architecture and open standards.

For example, in the e-Europe 2005 Action Plan, there is a commitment to have an agreed interoperability framework in place for members of the European Union by the end of 2003. It will be based on open standards and encourage the use of open source software.

Open source software – software such as Linux for which the source code is readily available – is gaining increasing attention, partly because it includes a license allowing anyone to modify and redistribute the software.

Open source software may be economically viable and presents opportunities for potential cost savings in some circumstances. A number of federal agencies already use open source software across a range of operations. For example, Centrelink, the

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Department of Veterans Affairs and the Bureau of Metereology are in the process of implementing open source solutions. Open source software, however, raises other issues such as who will provide ongoing support.

Proprietary software — the majority of the software we use on a daily basis — is distributed under very different conditions. A proprietary license prohibits modification, copying, or redistribution without the company's permission. It ensures that only one entity (the company or individual that created the software) has the right to make changes or even see the software's internal structure. Proprietary software often comes with its own support services.

One element of whole-of-government service delivery architecture is the choice of software. To date this choice has been based on fit-for-purpose and value-for-money. In effect, purchasing decisions are driven by business cases and this will continue. However, the range of available software and software business models is increasing and the full range of options will continue to be considered and understood when making choices about whole-of-government architecture.

The main issue is to determine the cost, benefits and risks of using either open source or proprietary software in a given situation. The Government will encourage trials of open source software within the framework of fit-for-purpose and value-for-money.

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PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT AND BENCHMARKING

In the initial phase of the *Government Online* Strategy, online surveys generated important information on agencies' progress towards the Prime Minister's December 2001 deadline for placing all appropriate services online. These surveys provided an essential 'pulse report' on online developments.

The Government learnt a lot from that experience. Under the new strategy, the emphasis will be on assessing the costs and benefits of online service delivery, since that information is of more strategic value when assessing e-government progress.

As with previous arrangements under the *Government Online* Strategy, it is important for agencies to establish business cases for investments in changes to their operational and business processes enabled by ICT, and the online environment in particular.

It is also important to assess 'how' agencies are travelling in terms of meeting the broad e-government agenda. This requires regular review mechanisms for assessing progress on key performance indicators across the federal government sector.

To facilitate this, NOIE will develop appropriate evaluation frameworks and benchmarks.

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CONCLUSION

Better Services, Better Government provides a vision for electronic government for federal agencies.

Much has been achieved since the *Government Online Strategy* was formulated. Federal agencies have been successful in ensuring that all appropriate information and services are now available on the Internet for those wanting to access them. This is by no means the end of the journey, but simply the first stage of a transition to a public sector which invests wisely in technology as a tool for delivering better online services.

Given the reach and impact of the federal government on all Australians, it is vital that we maintain our leading edge status in the provision of online government programs and services, as it impacts directly on our national competitiveness and therefore our future national prosperity.

E-government is characterised in this vision by six key objectives: to achieve greater efficiency and a return on investment; to ensure convenient access to government services and information; to deliver services that are responsive to client needs; to integrate related services; to build user trust and confidence; and to enhance closer citizen engagement.

Investing in e-government should deliver tangible returns, whether they take the form of real cost reductions, of increased efficiency and productivity, or of improved services to business and the broader community. It continues to be driven by a business case approach.

Online services are a part of a comprehensive redesign of government service delivery. For Australian government agencies, service delivery now entails managing multiple delivery channels. Services will still be delivered through traditional means such as via telephone access, fax or counter services. The overall goal though is to improve the quality of services across the board, and reduce the costs of both using and providing services. Online services, of course, have the distinct advantage of being accessible round the clock and from any location with access to the Internet.

Better Services, Better Government will ensure that we realise the significant benefits of e-government for all Australians.