Nebraska Information Technology Commission

Proposed Changes to Policies and Practices for Guiding Investments in Information Technology

Background

In creating the NITC, the Legislature recognized the need for "developing a statewide vision and strategic plan to guide investments in information technology". Legislative intent also cited the need to improve and integrate the "organizational and technical support for technology budget decisions." (Source: Section 86-513)

The NITC has adopted policies and procedures to guide technology decisions. These include
- The Statewide Technology Plan (www.nitc.state.ne.us)
- Technical Architecture – Standards and Guidelines (http://www.nitc.state.ne.us/standards/index.html)
- Agency Comprehensive Information Technology Plans (http://www.nitc.state.ne.us/forms/)
- Project Proposal Forms (http://www.nitc.state.ne.us/forms/)
- Project Review and Prioritization Procedures (http://www.nitc.state.ne.us/stp/2002/Section_4.pdf)
- NITC Recommendations on Technology Investments (http://www.nitc.state.ne.us/, See "Reports")
- Project Management Guidelines (http://www.nitc.state.ne.us/itpm/guidelines/guidelines.htm), and
- Project Status Reporting Requirements (http://www.nitc.state.ne.us/itpm/guidelines/guidelines.htm).

Although these policies and procedures have provided some guidance and have improved coordination among state entities, they do not give the NITC much opportunity in setting the agenda for strategic investments in information technology. The successful development of the statewide telecommunications network backbone demonstrates the benefits of proactive leadership in guiding investments in technology.

Potential Outcomes

The NITC has shown success in serving as a catalyst for accomplishing enterprise initiatives affecting multiple entities. Engaging in collaborative ventures without major expenditures of new funding, the NITC has aided progress in many areas. Examples include the statewide telecommunications backbone, telehealth network, statewide synchronous video network, community technology plans, e-government strategy, and security initiatives for information technology.

The biennial budget process provides another opportunity to promote cooperation on multi-agency initiatives. In the past, the role of NITC in this process has been limited to reviewing and prioritizing major information technology projects that are proposed by state agencies and those educational institutions that receive state appropriations. Potential enterprise projects are typically not addressed in the budget process, because they exceed the responsibilities of any individual agency.

A more proactive role would enable the NITC to focus attention on a small number of enterprise projects with significant and strategic importance to statewide or enterprise goals as identified by the NITC, after input from the NITC Councils, state agencies and other appropriate entities. The proposed changes in the process would allow agencies to address their potential role in these strategic initiatives, and the proposed changes would give policy makers more information about how to achieve progress toward attaining statewide information technology goals.

Proposed Changes

A. **Statewide Technology Plan:** Add a new section that lists a small number of initiatives (6 to 9) that the NITC may actively promote for the ensuing 1 to 3 years. These are projects that would materially advance the vision and statewide goals as identified by the NITC, that are ready to be implemented, or that require an enterprise approach, involvement by the NITC and cooperation of multiple entities for their success. With input from the NITC Councils, state agencies, and other appropriate entities, the NITC would review this list annually, with major updates corresponding to the biennial budget request process.

The formal process for identifying these strategic investments would involve, but not necessarily be limited to, the Councils, Technical Panel, and the NITC. It would begin with each Council identifying a very short list of 2 or 3 potential projects, based on general criteria. The criteria would include consideration of such factors as NITC statewide goals, statewide benefit, technical and financial feasibility, unique collaborative opportunities, and potential efficiencies or cost avoidance in the next 3 years. The Technical Panel would review the projects and provide advice on technical requirements and infrastructure.

The NITC would review, amend and adopt a combined list of strategic investments that would be included in the Statewide Technology Plan. This list would include both statewide or enterprise projects and allow for agency-initiated projects. For example, a federal mandate for an agency, or an agency project that has little statewide impact beyond its critical relationship to the agency's statutory mission, might still have greater urgency than the NITC's enterprise wide strategic investments.

B. **Agency Comprehensive Information Technology Plans:** A new section would give agencies the opportunity to describe current and proposed efforts that relate to one or more of the projects on the list of strategic investments in the Statewide Technology Plan. During the summer, NITC Councils or NITC staff will organize planning sessions to help identify the best avenues to undertake the projects listed in the Statewide Technology Plan. Information from these sessions will provide the basis for the gap analyses developed and presented to the NITC in November.

C. **Project Proposal Forms and Technical Reviews:** No changes in the project proposal form (http://www.nitc.state.ne.us/forms/) or technical reviews are needed in order to accommodate strategic investments in the Statewide Technology Plan. No changes are anticipated regarding the instructions on what constitutes a technology project that is subject to review by the NITC, and the system for scoring proposals would be similar to previous years. Project proposals pertaining to strategic investments would be subject to the same scoring as all other projects. The scoring from the technical reviews will provide the basis for initial list of prioritized projects, subject to review by the Councils.

D. **Statewide Technology Plan Strategic Investments – Gap Analysis:** NITC staff will evaluate budget requests and project proposals in terms of their impact on the list of strategic investments. A report to the NITC would identify important gaps and offer ways of addressing those deficiencies. Much of the information in the report will stem from the planning and organizational sessions conducted during the summer.

E. **NITC Recommendations on Technology Investments:** The NITC would review and amend the prioritized list of projects submitted by the Councils. The report from the NITC to the Governor and Legislature would include both the list of prioritized projects and the gap analysis regarding strategic investments in the Statewide Technology Plan. The NITC would also have the opportunity to develop recommendations regarding those strategic investments. Those additional recommendations could be part of the report that is due November 15 or they could come later.

The report to the Governor and Legislature would also include an overview of total spending on information technology. This analysis would provide context for evaluating the NITC's recommendations and agency budget requests.

F. **Timeframe**
   1. January & February: Develop Council lists;
   2. March: NITC approval of the list of strategic investments;
   3. June: NITC approve the Statewide Technology Plan.

4. June, July, and August: meetings to discuss, plan and coordinate agency budget requests pertaining to the strategic investments
5. August 1(?): Submission of Agency Comprehensive Information Technology Plans
6. September 15: Submission of Agency Budget Requests, including Project Proposals
7. September and October: analysis of Agency Comprehensive Information Technology Plans and Budget Requests; review and prioritization of Project Proposals
8. Wednesday November 10, 2004: NITC meeting
9. Monday November 15: Submit report to the Governor and Legislature.

G. APPENDIX

86-513 Legislative findings and intent.

(1) The Legislature finds that appropriations for information technology continue to increase. Advances in information technology have the potential to improve government efficiency, broaden educational opportunities, and enhance services to Nebraska communities and citizens. To assure the most cost-effective use of state appropriations:

(a) Responsibility should be assigned for developing a statewide vision and strategic plan to guide investments in information technology;

(b) Organizational and technical support for technology budget decisions should be improved and integrated;

(c) A clearinghouse should be formed for technical support and best practices information; and

(d) Responsibility should be assigned to an office within state government for improving the planning, budgeting, and management of state government's information resources.

(2) It is the intent of the State of Nebraska to support the development of a unified statewide telecommunications infrastructure. The statewide telecommunications infrastructure will be scalable, reliable, and efficient. It is further the intent of the Legislature that the provisions of sections 86-512 to 86-524 serve to coordinate the state's investments in information technology in an efficient and expeditious manner. The provisions are not intended to impede the rapid deployment of appropriate technology or establish cumbersome regulations or bureaucracy.

86-516 Commission; duties. The commission shall:

(1) Annually by July 1, adopt policies and procedures used to develop, review, and annually update a statewide technology plan;

(2) Create an information technology clearinghouse to identify and share best practices and new developments, as well as identify existing problems and deficiencies;

(3) Review and adopt policies to provide incentives for investments in information technology infrastructure services;

(4) Determine a broad strategy and objectives for developing and sustaining information technology development in Nebraska, including long-range funding strategies, research and development investment, support and maintenance requirements, and system usage and assessment guidelines;

(5) Adopt guidelines regarding project planning and management, information sharing, and administrative and technical review procedures involving state-owned or state-supported technology and infrastructure. Governmental entities, state agencies, and political subdivisions shall submit projects which directly utilize state-appropriated funds for information technology purposes to the process established by sections 86-512 to 86-524. Governmental entities and political subdivisions may submit other projects involving information technology to the commission for comment, review, and recommendations;

(6) Adopt minimum technical standards, guidelines, and architectures upon recommendation by the technical panel;

(7) Establish ad hoc technical advisory groups to study and make recommendations on specific topics, including work groups to establish, coordinate, and prioritize needs for education, local communities, and state agencies;

(8) By November 15 of each even-numbered year, make recommendations on technology investments to the Governor and the Legislature, including a prioritized list of projects, reviewed by the technical panel, for which new or additional funding is requested;

(9) Approve grants from the Community Technology Fund and Government Technology Collaboration Fund;

(10) Adopt schedules and procedures for reporting needs, priorities, and recommended projects; and

(11) Provide assistance upon request to the Public Safety Wireless Communication Advisory Board.