

NebraskaMAP Partners Committee

State Agency Hosting versus Private Hosting

July 21, 2011

Recommendation: The primary responsibility for hosting and support of the NebraskaMAP – an enterprise-level GIS/geospatial data sharing and services network – should remain within a state agency, as opposed to relying solely upon privately owned and managed sites to provide this critical data sharing service.

Current GIS online software allows a wide variety of entities to use the Internet to share, find and access available GIS data and online data and mapping services and the private sector should be encouraged to actively participate in this evolving distributed GIS data sharing network. However, a number of key public sector considerations (data security, data access, development priorities, accountability, public agency partnership considerations, emergency response, long-term cost savings) illustrate the unique need for a state agency supported and directed enterprise-level GIS data sharing service. Because of these considerations, the NebraskaMAP Partners Committee recommends that the NITC GIS Council, the Office of the CIO, and collaborating state, local and federal agencies continue efforts to work with the Partners Committee to support the development and maintenance of a state agency hosted, enterprise-level, GIS/geospatial data sharing and services network for Nebraska.

It is not the intent of this recommendation to preclude the possibility of a state agency responsible for providing such an online enterprise-level GIS data sharing service from contracting with the private sector to provide technical support for such a service. If it is determined that contracting for private technical support is to be pursued, the NebraskaMAP Partners Committee is willing to work with the responsible state agency to help define the technical requirements and responsibilities appropriate for an RFP, which would provide all interested private sector vendors the opportunity to bid.

Background

The NebraskaMAP – an enterprise-level GIS/geospatial data sharing and services network – is a collaborative (state, local, federal) project original conceived and initiated by the NITC GIS Council back in 2006. Since that time, a pilot project objectives were defined; two-year pilot funding was secured from multiple sources; pilot project staff was hired; and a two-year pilot development was completed with a working prototype moved to software and hardware located at the OCIO.

On January 18, 2011, Brenda Decker, Nebraska Chief Information Officer, referred to Michael Schonlau and Jeff McReynolds, Chair and Vice Chair of the NITC GIS Council, a proposal received from GIS Workshop for the private hosting of the NebraskaMAP service. Ms. Decker [requested](#) that the GIS Council and the NebraskaMAP Partners Committee meet with the GIS Workshop representatives to further explore the details of the proposal, review the merits of the GIS Workshop proposal, and develop a report and recommendations relative to the GIS Workshop proposal and future development of the NebraskaMAP.

The request from Ms. Decker, CIO, was presented to the GIS Council and it was discussed at the Council's March 2, 2011 meeting. The Council supported the proposal to forward Ms. Decker's referral on to the NebraskaMAP Partners Committee for its review and recommendations.

Since that time, the NebraskaMAP Partners Committee has held several meetings, at which the CIO's referral was discussed. The NebraskaMAP Partners have also arranged for a presentation from GIS Workshop and a discussion of its proposal. The Partners Committee was also made aware of the potential interest of other vendors should a decision be made to pursue private sector hosting of the NebraskaMAP. As a result of these discussions, the Partners Committee found that there were many potential combinations and variations related to how one might respond to elements of the GIS Workshop proposal and the possibility of similar proposals from other interested private sector entities. There were also many pros and cons discussed to the numerous combinations and variations. After much discussion and consideration, the Partners Committee decided to focus on the fundamental issue of the merits of a state agency hosting versus private sector hosting of such an enterprise-level data sharing service. Further discussion of all the pros and cons of the possible variations would then flow from a decision on that fundamental issue. Approached in this manner, the Partners Committee found a very strong consensus (although not unanimous) for a state agency hosting solution.

Among the issues and/or concerns raised in support of a state agency solution were the following:

- Reluctance of some current NebraskaMAP partners to share their data with private hosted system;
- Concerns about data security and maintaining restricted access to sensitive data among other potential data providers (e.g. recent Missouri River flooding and the need to host and serve some sensitive GIS/geospatial data that was provided by others on the condition of maintaining restricted access to the data);
- Investment already made in NebraskaMAP software and hardware with the potential for future cost savings as agencies consider utilizing the capabilities of this enterprise service and forego future agency-specific investments in hardware and software;
- Ability of collaborating partner public agencies to control the priorities and developmental direction of an enterprise-level state GIS portal and related services;
- Perceived lack of accountability for a potentially critical service when provided by the private sector without a contract and related fees;
- Ability to control and adjust the reliability of the service relative to the criticality of the applications;
- Most of the GIS data of interest to an enterprise-level GIS data sharing web service is data owned and developed by public agencies; and
- The online data services operated by GIS Workshop, and other similar private sector GIS data sharing and web services, will likely continue to operate whether not a state agency hosts an enterprise-level service because they meet an existing business need.