

2012 Digital Counties Survey Winners Announced

Noelle Knell | July 16, 2012



The 2012 Digital Counties Survey award winners were named Monday, July 16, by the Center for Digital Government (CDG), a national research and advisory institute focused on IT policies and best practices in state and local government.

Conducted by CDG and *Government Technology* — divisions of parent company e.Republic Inc. — in partnership with the National Association of Counties, the survey evaluates entrants on their ability to demonstrate successful outcomes through the strategic use of technology.

Ten winners were named in each of four population-based categories. The winning counties carried out strategies with measurable benefits that aligned with county priorities. Successful programs also showed progress over the previous year, utilized innovative solutions, and revealed a commitment to collaboration within and outside of their organization. The self-reported survey is judged by a panel of experts.

Below is a full list of the winners.

500,000 or more population:

1. Fairfax County, Va.
2. Oakland County, Mich.
3. Palm Beach County, Fla.
4. San Diego County, Calif.
5. Bexar County, Texas
5. King County, Wash.
6. Montgomery County, Md.
7. Orange County, Fla.
8. Fulton County, Ga.
8. Sacramento County, Calif.
9. Baltimore County, Md.
9. Tulsa County, Okla.
10. Hennepin County, Minn.
10. Wake County, N.C.

250,000-499,000 population

1. Dutchess County, N.Y.
2. Washoe County, Nev.
3. Dakota County, Minn.
4. Douglas County, Colo.
5. Chesterfield County, Va.
6. Clackamas County, Ore.
7. Loudoun County, Va.
8. Hamilton County, Ind.
9. Washtenaw County, Mich.
10. Anoka County, Minn.
10. Ottawa County, Mich.

150,000-249,999 population:

1. Sussex County, N.J.
2. Cumberland County, Pa.
3. St. Tammany Parish, La.
4. Gaston County, N.C.
5. Lackawanna County, Pa.
6. Catawba County, N.C.

7. Doña Ana County, N.M.
8. Cabarrus County, N.C.
9. Boone County, Mo.
10. Davidson County, N.C.
10. Onslow County, N.C.

Less than 150,000 population:

1. Charles County, Md.
2. Nevada County, Calif.
3. Roanoke County, Va.
4. Allegan County, Mich.
5. Napa County, Calif.
6. Albemarle County, Va.
7. Polk County, Wis.
8. Franklin County, Va.
9. Moore County, N.C.
10. Gloucester County, Va.

The four jurisdictions receiving the top award in each population category are highlighted below.

“This year, counties are focused on saving money where they can by simplifying their information technology infrastructure and sharing systems with other governments,” Center for Digital Government Executive Director Todd Sander said. “Many of them have found ways to provide better information security, transparency and citizen engagement with innovative uses of social media and advanced decision support tools.”

Charles County, Md. (Less than 150,000 population category)

A new bring-your-own-device policy in Charles County, Md., lets employees utilize their personal smartphones to do their jobs. Implemented at no cost to the county, the program enables staff to forgo a county-issued BlackBerry in favor of their own Web-connected cellphone, and the employee is reimbursed by the county for its usage. County IT chief Evelyn Jacobson explained that the county acquired software to push enterprise email out to a wide variety of employee-owned devices, including tablets. The county also has a new mobile device management system to help administer the program, with built-in flexibility to accommodate future developments in the mobile device market.

“With no funding at all, we were able to implement a bring-your-own-device policy at Charles County, and we're pretty proud of that,” she said.

A revamped citizen-focused website has been launched in [Charles County](#) as well. The site utilizes open source content management from [Drupal](#), administered at the department level. The new site features a common set of “Get Connected” elements on every page, providing many ways for residents to interact with the county. Site visitors can stay informed on county activities via social media, alerts and notifications, live-streamed county meetings and more.

The Digital Counties award is especially meaningful to Jacobsen and her staff given attrition of key technical staff the past few years, topped off by the departure of longtime CIO [Richard Aldridge](#) last year.

Charles County’s to-do list remains ambitious, with several new initiatives on the horizon. The county is considering a new countywide financial management software solution, and will be working with the State Attorney’s office on implementing new tools for document imaging and records management. IT staff also are moving forward with a recommendation from Charles County Commissioners to leverage infrastructure advantages offered by cloud computing.

Sussex County, N.J. (150,000 – 249,000 population category)

In [Sussex County, N.J.](#), IT officials were looking for ways to control operating expenses while making sure they could maintain the county’s vast network in a secure environment. Cities within the county also struggled to support distributed infrastructure across multiple sites while managing costs.

“Maintaining distributed individual silos of physical servers and data centers is not a very efficient business model,” Sussex County CIO William Kosinetz explained. The innovative virtualization solution now in use throughout Sussex County earned a first-place 2012 Digital Counties award.

Kosinetz describes the model as a “holistic hybrid” of public cloud, private cloud and on-premise computing, where all computing resources are combined into one resource pool. Those resources are then split into separate networks within the private cloud to provide service to individual entities. The 24 towns within the county now can secure segregated space within this private cloud. Operating expenses have been slashed by as much as 45 percent.

Virtualizing servers in the cloud allows the county to run 86 virtual servers on 6 physical servers. Desktop virtualization gives the network the capacity to run 500 desktops on an additional 7 physical servers. Using blade servers, rather than traditional rack-mounted servers, shrinks the carbon footprint even more, due to less wiring and cabling. Power consumption has been cut by up to one-fourth.

Dutchess County, N.Y. (250,000 – 499,999 population category)

In [Dutchess County, N.Y.](#), officials navigate a common two-pronged challenge: fiscal shortfalls coupled with increased citizen expectations of government. A new fiscal accountability team identified opportunities to meet these challenges through collaboration. Several noteworthy initiatives emerged, demonstrating savings and efficiencies by sharing services that provide value to residents.

Tim Mahler, commissioner of Dutchess County's Office of Computer Information Systems, explained to *Government Technology* that shared GIS services are now offered through the county's [Parcel Access](#) suite, which saw 91,500 unique users in 2011. This set of applications unites property data from a variety of sources into one online portal, where users can conduct address searches, estimate taxes, access appeal information and a number of other resources.

"These Web services have resulted in \$14 million annual savings by eliminating thousands of field trips and visits to county buildings by municipal assessors, highway departments, businesses, Realtors and the public," Mahler said.

Dutchess Delivery is engaging Dutchess County citizens like never before through a subscription-based outreach platform that offers notifications using several different methods, including text, email and social media. People are informed on issues they choose, such as emergency alerts, events and surveys. The service, provided through a contract with GovDelivery Inc., is also being offered at discounted rates to local cities as a shared service. Dutchess County's online innovation will continue this fall, with the launch of a new organization website.

Fairfax County, Va. (500,000 or more population category)

In the large county category, Fairfax County, Va., is noted for several leading initiatives. Fairfax County is putting a number of mobile apps and services in the hands of its tech-minded residents. Available on all platforms, residents can tap into local child-care availability, land use data, transit information, public facility locations, emergency alerts and many more.

A data consolidation effort is now under way to unify structured and unstructured land use data, with time savings anticipated for staff and the public. Best practices gleaned from the endeavor will help drive future big data efforts in many county service areas, including health and human services, public safety and taxation.

Fairfax County is reaping \$300,000 in financial benefits from its energy savings programs, which include remote power management of computing resources, virtualizing servers and consolidating storage. The county provisions applications out to departments through its private cloud, which the county hopes to extend to other local governments in the future.

Also a leader in the push for interoperability in the Fairfax area, the Public Safety Data Exchange system allows many jurisdictions to share emergency call data, bringing efficiencies to emergency response. CTO Wanda Gibson notes that governments have

seen a measurable business benefit from the program. The amount of time it takes to dispatch the appropriate emergency responders has been cut in some cases by 20 to 50 percent. Among the county's other leadership activities related to interoperability are the effort to interconnect the fiber network of local governments in northern Virginia.

Gibson credits a supportive community and staff for helping to propel Fairfax County's successful IT initiatives forward. " Basically our success is attributed to very tech-savvy constituents, good county leadership and incredible employees," Gibson said.

<http://www.govtech.com/e-government/2012-Digital-Counties-Survey-Winners-Announced.html>