# Exploring the Potential for Government to Citizen IT Solutions

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Earlier this month, New York City rolled out its first **digital road map** – a strategic plan that aims to "establish [New York City] as the world's top-ranked Digital City, based on indices of Internet access, Open Government, citizen engagement, and digital industry growth." As one of the most technologically advanced cities on the planet, the Big Apple often serves as a trailblazer for the types of digital solutions other cities and towns may seek in the future. The report, conducted by NYC Digital, details the current state of New York City's digital infrastructure; collects GovWin from thousands of residents, business owners and city employees; and uses that feedback to map out short-term and long-term improvements in government service through the World Wide Web. Through this process, the city hopes to improve Internet access as well as further citizen engagement and open government initiatives.

As part of its outreach effort, NYC Digital conducted surveys with the public in order to gauge interest levels for various technological services provided by the city. Requests for more public Wi-Fi, real-time public transportation information, updates to the city website, 311 mobile applications and streamlined social media were among the most popular. Nearly one-third of New York's digital outreach (30%) is done through social media. While digital newsletters account for a little more than half of this figure, Web 2.0 platforms like Facebook and Twitter are becoming increasingly prevalent vehicles for citizen engagement.

These requests have one major commonality: they're all about using the most recent advances in Web and mobile technology to connect citizens and government in ways that will have a practical impact on the everyday lives of New Yorkers. The last two years have been marked by federal, state and local government agencies slowly dipping their toes into incorporating social media as a tool for citizen engagement. Now, governments are leveraging Gov 2.0 technology to augment a broad range of public services, from **social media town halls** to **emergency management coordination**, to **citizen-based data collection and maintenance reporting**. New York City has developed more than 100 public applications designed to streamline city services in areas such as permits and applications, volunteer work, utility bill payments and city benefits programs.

The Knight Foundation and the Federal Communications Commission recently partnered to create an **"Apps for Communities" Challenge**, which awards up to $100,000 in prize money to developers who create software applications that deliver personalized, actionable information for citizens using local government and other personal data. New York's Department of Information Technology and Telecommunications partnered with the Economic Development Corporation to host a similar "Big Apps" contest to financially reward local software developers who could turn the city's 350 publicly available data sets into useful applications. The city of Glendale, California recently hired software company CitySourced to create customized GIS-based Web and mobile apps that allow citizens to catalogue, track and report broken sidewalks, potholes and other maintenance issues using their smartphones. With one application, Glendale has turned every smartphone user into a potential city inspector. CitySourced has developed similar applications for **San Diego**, San Jose, San Francisco and **Escondido**. New York City and automaker BMW recently **invested $5 million into MyCityWay**, a mobile software application that serves as a location-aware city guide for smartphone users.

Every month, more and more localities are **expressing interest** in these kinds of technologies. Ready-made e-government solutions that leverage existing social media, GIS and mobile technology platforms serve a number of government needs in the current economic climate. In addition to empowering citizens and furthering open government goals, they can help lessen the burden and lighten the workload of overtaxed employee resources. For budget-strapped states and localities facing potential layoffs and furloughs, these applications can be crucial tools for surviving in a post-recession world. Not many cities can match New York in technical and financial resources, and localities interested in citizen-engagement Web applications will increasingly look to the private sector to provide them. Companies that can present an established and standardized product to IT departments will have a leg up as other cities, towns and counties begin jumping on the app solution bandwagon.