

Michigan Capital Area  
Chapter of The  
American Society for  
Public Administration

Mid-Michigan's Voice for  
Public Service  
Since 1951



# PA Forum

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## Transforming Government: A Local Case Study

**By Robert J. Sobie**

The pressure to reduce fiscal deficits and to consolidate public budgets comes as no surprise to Jeff Sauter, Eaton County Prosecuting Attorney (Michigan). In fact, as an elected public leader he has spent much of his legal career researching innovative approaches for meeting constituent demand for civil services in an era of diminishing financial resources.

Public leaders who view technology as a fundamental tool for government provide a strong framework to transform the operations of government. The status quo manner in which government has traditionally operated cannot meet the efficiency and effectiveness challenges of the future and is unacceptable. New methods that fully integrate technology into the organizational and operational structures of government are necessary to truly transform government processes and entire institutions

The emergence of digital case files in criminal prosecution is an example of a new method founded on technology's ability to revolutionize the historical partnership between paper files and the labor-intensive practice of file management, a practice that is well established in all branches and levels of government.

*Six Trends Transforming Government*, a recent report from the IBM Center for The Business of Government ("Report"), stated, "The current conduct of American government is a poor match for the problems it must solve." Current government conduct, it is suggested, does nothing to encourage new initiatives designed to replace traditional methods.

Revolutionizing past conduct of American government requires significant changes to the "...rules of the game of government. The rules of the game relate to the core administrative procedures governing civil service systems..."

In 2003 the first of a series of new rules were implemented in the Eaton County Prosecuting Attorney's office with broad changes to the organizational and operational structure impacting criminal case prosecution. The challenge to staff was to build an environment in which technology is at the forefront of service delivery – in this setting, the successful prosecution of cases. For many years, Prosecutor Sauter was grounded in institutional practices based on paper-intensive case prosecution. But all that changed in 2003 with a personal and professional pledge never to return to

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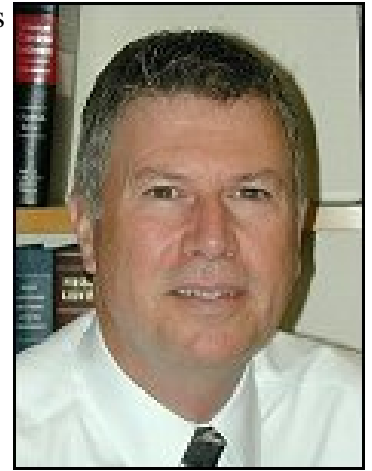
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## Transforming Government *continued...*

institutional complacency. His verdict, therefore, was to take a well-designed combination of attitudes, procedures, and technologies, mix them together into a kind of “transformational stew” and serve liberal amounts to himself and staff.



But what does it really mean to be known as transformational? According to the Report, transformational change can be distinguished from incremental change because transformational change is both “strategic and disruptive, aiming for significant, quantum improvements in effectiveness and significant cost savings.” Conversely, “incremental change is more evolutionary, where more modest management improvements and efficiency gains are the goal.” In the Eaton County Prosecuting Attorney’s office, transformational change is described as an aggressive approach for meeting civil service demands compared with incremental change as a more passive approach of muddling through.

Prosecutors execute their important responsibilities in historically paper-intensive offices whereby they have traditionally been dependent upon a physical file for criminal prosecution. Creating and monitoring the movement of case files is a significant administrative burden that often results in an estimated 40% of staff time committed to this labor-intensive process of case management.

Prosecutor Sauter implemented imaging technology to capture case documents and store them in digital case files. The imaging technology, coupled with an interface to the office’s case management system and broad availability of wireless network access throughout a sprawling government campus, attorneys are able to view and manage all case assignments and supporting files online. Attorneys are also mobile, moving between buildings, local offices, courtrooms, and conference rooms on any given day. To truly eliminate physical case files required the assignment of laptop computers to all attorneys to access case files wherever they were.

An important requirement for the imaging technology selected for deployment was the ability to capture, store, and organize a diverse collection of documents and supporting media that contribute to a case file. Photographs, digital video, audio recordings, and original digital documents created in common desktop software programs like word processing, are all stored in a common digital file.

Within a few months after implementation, the Prosecutor’s Office realized considerable budgetary savings from labor costs and consumables. There was a significant decrease in administrative staff time spent searching for case files and reductions in the use of consumable supplies such as paper, file folders, storage

*Continued on page 3.*

cabinets, and case labeling supplies. For fiscal year 2006/2007, department costs decreased by \$60,000. For the upcoming 2008/2009 fiscal year, the projected annual savings is \$95,000.

In addition to the internal cost reductions described, benefits are also evident outside the Prosecuting Attorney's office. Constitutionally, prosecutors must share file information with defendants which involved photocopying case documents. Today, this requirement is satisfied by e-mailing electronic copies of case documents to appropriate parties. The process has become so efficient that many court-appointed defense counsels receive e-mailed documents before they receive notice by U.S. mail or equivalent carrier of their appointment to a case.

Several local police agencies are now submitting original reports to the prosecutor using e-mail, which relieves these agencies of burdensome travel and postage expenses. Receiving reports as e-mail or e-mail attachments further benefits the prosecutor when administrative staff transfers the submission directly into the imaging solution, thus avoiding the scanning process to convert paper to digital.

A suitable disaster recovery process was also part of the overall transformation from paper to digital case files. The case management portion of the solution runs on a network server located in a secure and disaster resistant building separate from the Prosecuting Attorney's office. In the event this server is damaged, or otherwise fails, the case management software is installed on a backup system located in a second secure location. All of the digital case files are stored on a storage area network located in a secure and disaster resistant building. The storage area network has built-in redundancies such as disk drives, power supply, network connections for maximum availability. Nightly, all digital case files are copied to computer tape and stored offsite in a secure location.

The strongest evidence of a transformation of government within the Eaton County Prosecuting Attorney's office is the replication of the solution in other parts of Michigan and nationally. After meeting with Prosecutor Sauter and his staff, Livingston County, Michigan's Prosecuting Attorney successfully transitioned to digital case files in late 2006 with many more incrementally moving forward with the idea. Overall, 18 county prosecutors in Michigan, including larger metropolitan areas like Kalamazoo County and Washtenaw County, have observed the solution in operation and collectively expressed interest in transforming their respective offices as well.

Outside of Michigan, prosecutors and technology professionals from California, Oregon, Arizona, North Carolina, Wyoming, and Utah, either directly or as part of a group presentation on regional and national stages, have learned of the benefits of digital case file management and are applauding the transformative nature of Eaton County's solution. Prosecutor Sauter calls the entire process, "liberating" and encourages all branches and levels of government to change the rules of government.

*The author wishes to express his appreciation for the editorial contributions of George Orban.*

## Celebrate Public Service

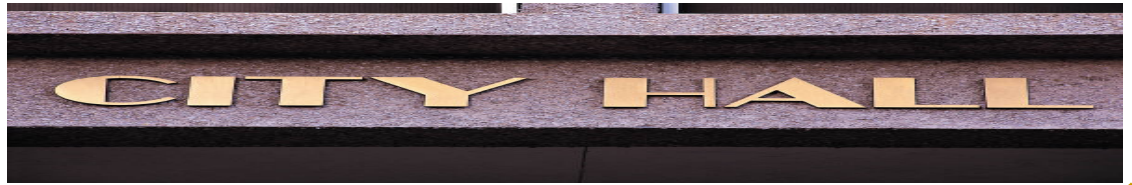
Public Service Recognition Week (May 5—11, 2008) honors the men and women who serve as federal, state, and local government employees. The celebration has been held the first Monday through Sunday in May since 1985.



Public employees across the U.S. are invited to celebrate the important services they provide to the citizens in every community throughout the country. To learn more about how to celebrate public service recognition week, go to The Council for Excellence in Government Web site located at [www.excelgov.org/psrw](http://www.excelgov.org/psrw).



Source: <http://www.excelgov.org/psrw>



## ASPA Regional Conference

### By MiCAP Board

MiCAP is pleased to support the Southwestern Michigan Chapter's initiative to host a regional ASPA conference later this year. The conference is scheduled for **November 6 & 7** at the **Amway Grand Plaza Hotel** ([www.amwaygrand.com](http://www.amwaygrand.com)).

Additional information will be included in future issues of **PA Forum** and posted on our Web site.



*Gerald R. and Betty Ford Presidential  
Ballroom*

# MiCAP is on the Web

## By MiCAP Board

MiCAP developed and implemented a new Web site in January 2008. You can access the site by pointing your computer to: [www.mipaforum.org](http://www.mipaforum.org). Although parts of the Web site are still under construction, MiCAP’s presence on the Web provides a useful resource for members to access our newsletter archives, identify contact information for board members, view a schedule of board meetings, and it serves as a marketing and collaboration tool.



Considering that the Web site will undergo frequent updating of content, please consider providing some critical feedback about the overall quality and value of the site and any suggestions for the site’s on-going improvement. Your comments are always welcome.



[www.mipaforum.org](http://www.mipaforum.org)

## Call for Papers and Articles

**Topics:** A broad selection of topics are welcome including common disciplines like governance, strategic planning, leadership, administration and service, public policy, non-profit management, technology, human resources, outsourcing, and case studies.

**Authors:** Practitioners, theorists, students, consultants, and so on. You don’t need to be a member of the MiCAP Chapter of ASPA (although we encourage you to join) in order to have your paper or article considered for publication. If you are a student, or recent graduate, publication of your article enhances your professional development and resume.

**Submission:** Citations must follow academically accepted formats (i.e. APA, Chicago, and Harvard styles). Send your articles, in Word or Adobe formats, to [gorban@voyager.net](mailto:gorban@voyager.net)

### Publishing Schedule:

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March	September
May	November



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**MiCAP Mission Statement**

- Advances the art, science, teaching, and practice of public and non-profit administration.
- Promotes the value of joining and elevating the public service profession.
- Builds bridges among all who pursue public purposes.
- Provides networking and professional development opportunities to those committed to public service values.
- Achieves innovative solutions to the challenge of governance.

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**Upcoming Events & Opportunities**

- May 5—11, 2008:**      **Public Service Recognition Week**  
[www.excelgov.org/psrw](http://www.excelgov.org/psrw)
- May 21, 2008:**      **MiCAP Chapter Board Meeting**  
**Noon—1:00 p.m.**      The University of Michigan—Lansing Service Center  
 101 S. Washington Square, 7th Floor
- Summer 2008**      **“Meet and Greet” your MiCAP Board Members**  
**(date pending)**      **University Center, Lansing Community College**
- Fall, 2008:**      **University Student’s Exhibition of Project Papers**  
**(date pending)**      **State Capital**

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