

Memo in Support of Geographic Information Officer GeoBoard Recommendation

GeoBoard Recommendation 20174Q-1 is to “*Establish and fund the position of PA Geospatial Information Officer within the Office of Administration (OA)*”, and outlines the basic need for such a role in the Commonwealth.

In an effort to expand on the recommendation, GeoBoard members reviewed the report (*) of a task force empaneled by the Georgia Technology Authority (GTA) to determine business sustainability options for a proposed Geographic Information Office (GIO) for the State of Georgia. The report relied on both in-state analysis and perspectives from the GIO’s of seven (7) states (**), making the findings useful for other states including Pennsylvania. The fact that as of 2013 there were already 37 states with a Geographic Information Officer or officially recognized GIS coordinator might be enough to spur action here in Pennsylvania, but the Georgia report is fairly detailed and can save Pennsylvania much time if we acknowledge similar needs. Some useful excerpts from the Executive Summary include:

Location of Geographic Information Office

From organizational and political perspectives, the GIO must be located such that city, local, and state agencies and departments are served equitably. Related to that, the GIO will not be successful if it is placed within an organization that consumes a disproportionate amount of the resources of the GIO for its own purposes. The GIO will more likely be viewed by both state and local governments as a credible and authoritative entity if it exists within state government. The GIO needs to be organizationally near enough to state decision makers to have influence, but not so close to the center of state government to be automatically impacted by gubernatorial change.

- *Nearly all who participated in the interviews felt strongly that the GIO must be organizationally located in a neutral location, one in which the mission of the host organization supports the goals of the GIO and does not arrogate the resources of the GIO to the benefit of the hosting organization and the detriment of other stakeholders and partners.*
- *Some of the interview participants suggested that the GIO be located in or near the Office of the Governor to give it apparent authority. Others suggested that the GIO should find a location that is sheltered from administration changes to better ensure continuity.*
- *It was generally agreed that the GIO should be located within a state agency rather than a local or regional government organization or university to establish authority and credibility. Many, though, noted that it will be important for the Geographic Information Officer to be able to build and maintain relationships at all levels of government, with higher education, and with the private sector.*
- *The 2013 National States Geographic Information Council (NSGIC) GIS Maturity Assessment showed that Geographic Information Offices were most commonly located within the state office of information or technology. Other states located the office within another existing state agency or the Governor’s office.*

** The report entitled “*Sustainability Study for a Georgia Geographic Information Office*”, dated March 12, 2015 is found at: <http://polis.iupui.edu/index.php/geographic-information-officer-what-it-is-and-why-your-state-needs-one/>

** *GIO’s interviewed included those from: South Carolina, Utah, Arkansas, Oregon, New York, Maryland, Vermont, Idaho.*

Staffing of Geographic Information Office

We believe that a minimalist approach to staffing the Georgia GIO is appropriate to begin the office. In addition to the Geographic Information Officer, we recommend having an Office Administrator that supports administration of calendars and routine communication, organizing education events, etc. We also recommend that a GIS Analyst be part of the GIO staff. Analyst responsibilities would include data processing, map creation, and application development.

Costs and Funding

Administrative and operational costs consist of those costs needed to operate the GIO and include salaries and benefits, office costs (space, phone, communication, and technology), travel costs, and incidentals (memberships, conference attendance, postage, etc.). We estimate that administrative and operational costs will initially be in the range of \$300,000 to \$400,000 annually and will adequately cover resources that are required to accomplish the core work of the GIO. Core work includes efforts associated with collaboration and coordination, education and outreach, pursuit of funding, grant and agreement administration, and integration of framework data sets produced by others. Core work does not include the creation and maintenance of data.

The entire report echoes ideas voiced repeatedly here in Pennsylvania since we established the GeoBoard over two years ago. The need for a GIO has been identified within each Task Force, in a statewide questionnaire of GIS professionals, identified as a priority in the GeoBoard Strategic Plan, and acknowledged nationally. The benefits are essentially those we expect from government that works – efficiency, coordinated actions, and vastly improved communications.

In an industry based in rapidly evolving technologies, the establishment and support of a Pennsylvania GIO will increase the pace of progress while simultaneously reducing the chance of decisions made without complete understanding of the opportunities at hand.