e-Government and Public Policy
Moderator: Stuart Shulman, Drake University

The "e-Government and Public Policy" BoF Session had 20 attendees from a wide range of academic and public sector positions. Much of the discussion centered on the role for public participation and increased information availability in decision-making. Participants raised theoretical and practical concerns about the volume, nature, and efficacy of public input. Hopes and concerns were raised about the IT tools currently being developed to capture and analyze such data. A vigorous debate emerged around the concept of transformation and the group failed to reach a consensus about whether or not eGov was likely to produce fundamental changes in public policy processes or outputs. There was, however, general agreement that much of the optimistic speculation surrounding eGov meant that policy processes were adapting to use IT on the basis of an untested assumption that more information throughput is inherently better. Participants noted the recent eGov Act, which seeks to enhance this trend, relied on an unproven premise of a leveling effect when IT increases procedural transparency.

The group made a number of suggestions regarding areas for more research. At the top of the list were basic attitudinal questions: What do citizens want from eGov? What do they think is fair? Who should pay for eGovernment services in light of fiscal policy that moves costs on to end-users? Some proposed research questions focused on design issues, so the group recommended that the HCI field assist in the identification of mechanisms and procedures that encourage more representative and deliberative responses in decision-making processes. Also, research should determine whether there are benefits associated with guiding citizens to provide better input. Is there a need for agency experimentation with deliberative democracy that is not shut down by centralization through government-wide portals? The group believed there is a need to provide greater incentives to study the impact of the digital divide on civic identity and social capital. A consensus emerged that researchers need new measures of democratic accountability and responsiveness, and that there ought to be an expanded role for simulations in decision-making processes. Some of the tougher long-term questions included: What is the policy agenda for enabling technology transfer? What are the impacts of ICTs on the relations between bureaucracy and citizens? How is outsourcing IT tasks going to change public policy and participation? What new metrics will provide useful baseline data on the impact of eGovernment over the next 10-20 years?