

METROGIS DECISION MAKING PROCESS

AND

SUPPORTING PHILOSOPHY

*Compiled by MetroGIS Staff Coordinator
NSDI Partnership Training Initiative - January 2006*

I. MAJOR TYPES OF DECISIONS

Local and regional government collaboratively acting as if a single enterprise (in terms of addressing common needs) to:

- Approve and advocate for a mission and guiding principals that provide clear focus for the purpose and desired outcomes of MetroGIS's efforts.
- Approve collaborative priorities and related major program objectives.
- Endorse a statement of common priority geospatial information and related technology needs.
- Endorse regional solutions to common geospatial needs, including:
 - Data content standards
 - Custodian roles and responsibilities
 - Best practices

II. SUPPORTING PHILOSOPHY

A. Accepted Truths

- All core stakeholders (local and regional government entities) can improve the effectiveness of their service delivery, information management, decision support, and responsive to their constituents through use of geospatial technology.
- All core stakeholders have geospatial needs common to other core stakeholders.
- No organization is capable or has a business need to support all of the components needed to effectively address common geospatial needs of the local and regional government community that serves the seven county metropolitan area.
- Working collaboratively, as a virtual single enterprise, to address common geospatial needs minimizes expenses for the taxpayer by reducing redundancies and providing a mechanism to effectively leverage existing investments.
- MetroGIS is not a project, with a definable end. Rather, it is a program that involves ongoing monitoring and enhancement of established processes to maximize efficiencies for a host of functions and responsibilities core to the existence of government entities serving the metro area.
- A broadly collaborative system can not be sustained without trust in and respect for the underlining collective decision-making processes.

B. Defining Characteristics - MetroGIS Organization

- Forum to foster collaboration on a variety of common geospatial program needs - *more than just data.*
- Unincorporated organization - *no mandate or legal standing.*
- Can not own data, receive, or spend funds- *rely on stakeholders.*
- Elected officials comprise the Policy Board – *political reality check and elevate issues to matters of appropriate public policy.*
- Consensus-based decisions on matters fundamental to success.
- Voluntary compliance with endorsed policies/procedures.
- Implementing the NSDI Area Integrator concept - *vertical interoperability of regionally endorsed data solutions.*

C. Guiding Maxims – MetroGIS Organization

- All relevant and affected interests, dominated by none.
- Active involvement of elected officials public policy reality check
- Investments made by one government interest ought to be leverageable by other government interests. (*Knowledge sharing and consensus solutions improve leveragability*)

- Never ask a stakeholder to do something for the community for which they do not have an internal need and capabilities. (*Organizations determine for themselves **that** it is more cost effective to participate in a voluntary, collaborative environment than to address their geospatial needs on their own.*)
- Funding is not the only way to contribute - data, applications, equipment and people - are also valuable partnership assets.

D. Guiding Principals - MetroGIS Organization

- Secure broad support for vision and policies - engage knowledgeable and respected participants
- Build once, share many times (data and applications). *Requires consensus standards!*
- Widespread sharing of the data improves data quality and ultimately decision support
- Focus on priority common business information needs
- Participation in related state and national initiatives results in valuable knowledge sharing and partnership opportunities - part of something bigger.
- Source data can not be changed when assembled into regional solutions
- Cost recovery of data development expenses stifles sharing of commonly needed data and partnering opportunities.

III. DECISION MAKING PROCESSES

A. General:

- The Policy Board and the Coordinating Committee are keepers of the process – insuring that method used to arrive at decisions critical to long-term success comply with guiding principals.
- Voluntary cooperation is critical to implementation of regional solutions, thus consensus-based decision making is the norm. If non-compliance with a desired best practice or policy will have a negative consequence on the broader community, the issue must be resolved to the satisfaction of all core stakeholders before endorsed as a regional solution.
- The actual decision rules can be viewed at http://www.metrogis.org/about/history/ops_guidelines.pdf.

B. Organizational – Mission/Purpose, Functional Priorities, Major Program Objectives

- Substantive business/strategic planning efforts have been undertaken on three occasions resulting in the mission statement, organizational structure, many of the current guiding principals, as program objectives. Two formal business planning initiatives followed resulting the 2000-2003 and 2003-2005 Business Plans (more about these plan can found at http://www.metrogis.org/about/business_planning/index.shtml).
- To foster credibility and trustworthiness, the processes have been broadly participatory and multi-faceted. A workgroup of the Coordinating Committee, representative of the broad community, was also responsible for overseeing each Business Planning initiative.
- The same three core functions¹ have comprised MetroGIS's effort from the outset. Once solutions are defined, they are implemented and monitored for user satisfaction. Improvements are made over time to remain responsive to common user needs.

C. Regional Solutions to Common Geospatial Needs - Data, Applications, and Standards

- A broadly participatory, multi-faceted process was used to define high-level common information needs. Thirteen common information needs currently guide MetroGIS's efforts.
- On an information need-by-information need basis, a broadly participatory process is used to agree upon desired specifications for each regional solution (data content, application

¹ - Support a "forum" to foster coordination through knowledge sharing and use of best practices,
 - Facilitate effective long-term solutions to priority common information needs (regional datasets and related applications),
 - Support an efficient mechanism for Internet-based discovery and retrieval of geospatial data and information (MetroGIS DataFinder).

- functionality, access policy, standards, and best practices) and custodial roles and responsibilities, secure a custodian(s) to perform the desired roles, and establish desired access policy. (A schematic which illustrates this process can be viewed at http://www.metrogis.org/data/about/info_needs_process_diagram.pdf and more information about the process itself can be reviewed at <http://www.metrogis.org/data/about/index.shtml> .
- MetroGIS's core stakeholders are the 300+ local and regional government entities serving the seven county area. A schematic of major categories of stakeholder relationships is attached.

In short, endorsed best practices (e.g., adherence to standards and knowledge sharing) must be acceptable to those entities which the community wishes to employ them and those organizations performing critical support for regional solutions (e.g., maintenance of primary data, assembly into regional datasets, data distribution, and foster collaboration) must be comfortable they are receiving benefit greater than if they were to go it alone. Trusted, broadly representative processes for needs identification and decision-making to implement equitable solutions are fundamental to sustaining such long term collaboration.