

CHAPTER 9

ELECTRONIC GOVERNANCE AND ELECTRONIC DEMOCRACY: *LIVING AND WORKING IN THE WIRED WORLD*

RECOMMENDATIONS

There are numerous ways that governments at the local, regional and national level can facilitate these new forms of democracy that are emerging. One is to take the example of Canada. The Canadian government, through their Community Access Program (CAP) has a goal to establish over 10,000 public access sites in rural and urban communities across Canada. Launched in 1994, CAP has already established over 4,200 sites in approximately 3,000 rural and remote communities and is a key component of the government's "Connecting Canadians" strategy - aimed at making Canada the world's most connected nation." The program is now being expanded to include urban centres with populations over 50,000.

CAP matching funds of up to \$17,000 per site are available to eligible applicants such as educational institutions, public libraries, community organisations, and municipal and territorial governments. The community funds can include cash or "in kind" contributions such as facilities, equipment and staffing of public access sites.

This is a good model to be followed not only by national governments but international organisations. If we are to handle the digital divide between those who have the opportunities to be on-line and the vast numbers of people who cannot necessarily afford the costs of going on-line, it is going to be essential to level the playing field. In any populist democracy it is important that initiatives embrace all the people. At the moment it is estimated there are only between 150 and 200 million people on-line. These are small numbers where our world population has exceeded 6 billion people.

International organisations could also provide programs to educate people on usage of the Internet. Education then leads to individual usage. It will,

naturally, vary from individual to individual but through knowledge of how to use the Internet people can be participants in this new trend in democracy as they see fit. Such programs can embrace many peoples around the world and ensure that the users who most benefit are not just those in the affluent, industrialized countries.

National Government should seek ways to engage their citizenry in the process of government. They can do this in many ways such as the following:

- ☐ Making more information available on-line from government itself to ensure there is an informed citizenry;
- ☐ Providing web sites that seek input from people on all manner of government programs and issues;
- ☐ Developing listservs and discussion groups on important national issues and other means to engage the citizenry;
- ☐ Provide grants to organisations seeking on-line democratic activities;
- ☐ Develop local community projects that embrace all levels of society from the academic world, to businesses, large and small, to non-profit and volunteer organisations.

As indicated above the Internet is a medium that has allowed people to involve themselves in the democratic process in new and unique ways. Governments at all levels and international organisations will increasingly be impacted by these changes. Thus, there is also a need for awareness building within governments and international organisations of the changes that are occurring. This can be accomplished through educational and training programs.