

 **PREMIUM CONTENT:** Jan 25, 2013, 6:00am EST

**Small Business innovation**

## Old city, new ideas

**Boston's technology chief is getting lots of attention for finding innovative ways to enhance traditional services**

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Mary K. Pratt, Special to the Journal

Anyone who wants to know just how Boston measures up can now find a host of information

on the city's new online site, Boston About Results.

There, you'll find statistics covering a range of areas, from fighting crime to performing required inspections to handling graffiti and collecting taxes. It's the kind of scorecard that businesses often use to measure their own operations or let customers rate their experiences. Now it's one that Boston owns, too, thanks to the city's Department of Innovation & Technology.

In a city well known for innovation, it's no surprise that Boston's own chief information officer would feel compelled to open new fronts in the collection and publication of information pertinent to city residents and businesses alike. Bill Oates, who became Boston's CIO in 2006 after 20-plus years working in the private sector, said his goal is like that of any CIO: use technology to propel the organization's mission. In this case, he said, he's focused on using IT to help the city better serve its constituents.

"We do all the things we do to make the city more efficient. We have classic projects that help us get a better bang for the buck, and we've done a nice job on the innovation side to think about how we can address issues in the city," Oates said. "We have an innovation team looking at all the issues we face and thinking about how to leverage new technology to find new ways to solve problems, to find ways to better engage, connect and serve the community."

That work is getting a lot of attention. Boston's Citizens Connect, the city's suite of communications channels and mobile apps that enable residents to alert the city to problems or issues, was a 2012 CIO 100 award honoree and won the [Harvard University Bright Ideas in Government Award](#) in 2011. The Center for Digital Government, a California-based industry group, named Boston the No. 1 Digital City in America for 2010. And that same year Boston's website earned first place in the 2010 National "Best of Web" Competition.

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Oates, who oversees an IT staff of about 120 and an operating budget of nearly \$22 million, said his top priority is building on those successes.

"The early innovations turn into new innovations and new approaches on how to solve problems. This culture of innovation has really taken hold," he said.

Others have noticed that, too.

[Chris Osgood](#), co-chair of the Mayor's Office of New Urban Mechanics, a city department aiming to improve the delivery of local services, credited Oates with pushing partnerships with private industries and academic institutions while also rolling out numerous pilot programs to further improve the use and effectiveness of technology throughout the city.

"He's pushed our use of technology much further in a direction that makes a lot of sense given the mission of our mayor ([Thomas Menino](#)). Our mayor is a people-driven leader, and Bill's been able to figure out a way to use technology to make the city more professional in its service as well as more personal," Osgood said.

Like other CIOs, he said he's looking at so-called big data and how to leverage the city's reams upon reams of information for better use. One idea is marrying the city's own data with other sources to perform predictive analytics, a field of IT that uses data to forecast issues, problems and potential behaviors and enable the city to allocate resources accordingly.

Oates said he is open to new ideas, no matter where they're coming from. Oates is also sharing his successes, meeting with peers from other municipalities to advise and learn how technology can further advance public-sector services.

"What we're really trying to do here is be even more innovative. We're all trying to solve the same problems," he said.