

# City searching for temp tech chief

Interim CIO likely to make 'nasty decisions then leave'

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WHEN BRIAN DENZER started working in information technology support for the New Orleans Police Department in 1998, the city didn't have a description for his position. The city instead "shoehorned" his role into that of a pothole repair worker, he said.

"To this day, I don't think they ever came up with a job description," Denzer said.

He left that job in 2001 and now works as

an independent information technology consultant and is an advocate for data-driven performance management for the city through his website, Nolastat.org. He says his story, while humorous, characterizes a City Hall functioning on decades-old mainframes, even a few computers with green screens.

The out-of-date system is hurting city services but has operated behind closed doors for years while IT leadership enmeshed the city in contracting controversy and cosmetic technology solutions such as crime cameras, he said.

"I don't think the public has any idea of what happens inside City Hall."

But Denzer and others in the technology community say the Landrieu administration's open acknowledgement of cracks in the city's core IT system during its search

for an interim chief information officer is the first step in advancing local government out of the Stone Age.

"It's not very sexy to focus on geeky stuff like service-oriented architecture and data, but these are really critical things that are needed for the city to even begin to streamline and improve its business processes," Denzer said.

Coordinating a basic IT governance structure is one item on a laundry list of responsibilities outlined in the interim CIO job description the city posted online in late April. While the interim CIO is expected to stabilize and reposition the technology department by the end of the year, the Landrieu administra-

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tion is making it clear that the person selected will be a start to a long process and ineligible for the permanent position.

The permanent CIO will "have a much bigger vision about what the office should do" while the interim meets immediate needs, said Ryan Berni, a mayor's office spokesman. "Someone needs to be in right now who can hit the ground on day one."

That the city is choosing to hire an interim IT chief rather than fill a permanent position has many interested onlookers confused. But Alan Shark, executive director of the Washington, D.C.-based Public Technology Institute, said the temporary position may allow the person who fills the interim post more freedom to make unpopular choices without fearing political repercussion.

"Someone can go in there and make the nasty decisions and then leave," Shark said.

The permanent CIO will in turn balance diplomacy with technical know-how to usher departments into change, he said.

PTI, a nonprofit resource for technology executives in local government, offered to assist the city's former technology officers after Katrina but did not get a response.

One of the more significant changes the interim CIO is expected to make is a shift to a data-driven performance analysis program similar to one that helped change municipal govern-

ments in Baltimore and Washington, D.C., an approach Chief Administrative Officer Andy Kopplin has said New Orleans would take.

The program uses measurable data — how long it takes to fix a pothole, for instance — to gauge government performance and set goals for improvement.

Denice Warren Ross, deputy director of the Greater New Orleans Community Data Center, said integrating city data and using it to improve city services is the first step in creating quality information the public can use. She noted that after Katrina, residents were buying and receiving building permits for properties that were scheduled for demolition.

Years later, city data, such as building permits and code violations, are still scattered among departments and not even looked at internally, Ross said.

"If you're not using the data internally, it's not going to be very high-quality," she said.

The GNOCDC relies on federal statistics rather than city data to gather information on housing and repopulation data.

"It's less than ideal but it's the best that we have," Ross said.

Access to local data is key in understanding issues such as housing blight, which Mayor Mitch Landrieu highlighted as a focus area for improvement as he formed his transition team, as well as building market confidence for businesses in New Orleans.

"It's not enough to have fancy maps and a hunt-and-peck website," Ross said. •

### Seeking the right fit

Mayor Mitch Landrieu is looking for an interim chief information officer who will hold the job for six to nine months and won't be eligible for the permanent position. According to a job description on the Landrieu transition team's website, the interim CIO will be responsible for overhauling a department "working to fight fires" and suffering "from textbook failures of IT governance." Primary responsibilities for the job include:

- providing technology and information systems support to make city services more effective, efficient and equitable across all populations and neighborhoods, including those with limited access to technology;
- developing an IT strategy that is updated annually and effectively communicated to stakeholders inside and outside of City Hall;
- fostering an organizational culture where opportunities for cost-savings are identified, shared and implemented;
- working within civil service framework, including the creation of accurate job descriptions, annual performance reviews, as well as building internal capacity and institutional knowledge instead of hiring long-term contractors for key city functions;
- developing and executing service level agreements with agencies that define tech support, application development, shared or centralized IT solutions and other services;
- establishing standards and systems for sharing public data; and
- supervising the development of a consistent and usable web presence that is easy for departments to keep up-to-date and accurate.

Source: Transition New Orleans

