

Executive Support and Sustainable Funding for Geospatial Programs

Building a successful geospatial program requires strong executive support for the use of GIS across a wide variety of business processes. While a program may start by supporting a single business process, like public safety or natural resource management, gaining executive support across the entire organization is crucial to the long-term viability of the program. The larger the organization, the more challenging this can be. But gaining strong executive support is the path to sustainable funding. The National Geospatial Advisory Committee has a good paper on [GIS best practices for local governments](#).

The key to gaining broad executive support is to understand the executives' vision and the difficulties they face in implementing that vision. Demonstrating return on investment from GIS relative to the executives' issues and priorities is a powerful means of gaining their support and achieving sustainable funding for the geospatial program. The URISA Board has endorsed the National States Geographic Information Council document on [Economic Studies for GIS Operations](#) as a valuable reference. Policy agreements should be made to use a portion of documented savings to fund ongoing operation of departments that create and maintain the organization's geospatial data. For established geospatial programs, it is important to measure return on investment using proven econometric methods. To initiate a new geospatial program, part of a sound business case should point to measured ROI for programs in other organizations of similar size and complexity. A recent [ROI study](#) in King County, WA provides a great example.

Another crucial element in gaining executive support and sustainable funding for the geospatial program is participation in, and support of, a strong and active geospatial community. The URISA Chapters are a valuable asset from which to derive and share best practices, guidelines, and standards. There are 29 URISA Chapters, including 4 in Canada, 1 in the Caribbean, and 1 in the United Arab Emirates, with several more being contemplated in the U.S. and other countries. To be a valuable asset, the Chapters must have active participation and strong leadership from GIS professionals, as well as collaboration with a wide variety of geospatial practitioners and associations, including surveyors, photogrammetrists, academics, cartographers, geologists, engineers, assessors, planners, etc.

The social, economic, environmental, and cultural aspects of well-being for every community are inextricably linked to each other by place. Geospatial technology should be used to make those connections explicit in order to wisely manage the community's resources. In places where the geographic or locational context of community activities and resources is used to visualize and then manage the connections, trends, and patterns, emergency response happens more quickly, social services are less costly, natural resources are better conserved, and economic development is enhanced.

URISA strongly supports, and encourages all government leaders to support, the following three actions:

- a) Develop, promote and implement URISA's Return on Investment Model for GIS
 - Organizations should measure the return on their GIS investment in a standard way that follows fundamental economic principles, and allocate a portion of those revenues to the ongoing maintenance and support of the agency's geospatial resources
- b) Engage URISA Chapters to promote and enhance geospatial activities
 - All organizations that use GIS benefit from participation in a strong, active geospatial community that shares ideas, best practices, guidelines, and standards
- c) Encourage the application of geospatial technology in support of social, economic, environmental, and cultural well-being of communities
 - The use of geospatial technology and locational data across all aspects of planning and operations will help ensure that communities are managing their human, capital and natural resources in ways that derive the most well-being for their citizens