

**NSDI 2010 CAP GRANTS  
CATEGORY 3  
FINAL REPORT FROM MASSGIS**

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**Agreement Number:** G10AC00174

**Project Title:** A Business Plan for Standardized Tax Assessor Parcel Mapping for Massachusetts

**Organization:** MassGIS, One Ashburton Place, Room 1601, Boston, MA 02108,  
[www.mass.gov/mgis](http://www.mass.gov/mgis)

**Principal Investigator:** MacGaffey, Assistant Director, 617-619-5641  
[neil.macgaffey@state.ma.us](mailto:neil.macgaffey@state.ma.us)

**Collaborating Organizations:**

Department of Revenue, Division of Local Services  
Contact: David Davies, Director, Information Technology  
address: PO Box 9569, Boston, MA 02114-9569  
web address: [www.mass.gov/dor](http://www.mass.gov/dor)

Massachusetts Association of Assessing Officers  
Contact: Robert J. Ellia, Executive Director  
address: PO Box 70, Shrewsbury, MA 01545  
web address: [www.maaao.org](http://www.maaao.org)

Massachusetts Association of Regional Planning Agencies  
Contact: Timothy W. Brennen, Secretary  
address: c/o PVPC 60 Congress Street, Springfield, MA 01104  
web address [www.pvpc.org](http://www.pvpc.org)

State 911 Department  
Contact: Thomas Ashe, Deputy Executive Director  
address: 1380 Bay Street, Building C, Taunton, MA 02780-1088  
web address: [www.mass.gov/e911](http://www.mass.gov/e911)

**Executive Summary**

As proposed, MassGIS staff started the project by conducting a series of “workshops” around the state. The workshops presented the idea of standardized statewide assessor parcel mapping and its related benefits. Approximately 215 people, most from municipal departments, attended these events and provided useful insights. MassGIS also retained consulting assistance for developing the business plan. Working with the consultant, MassGIS staff conducted in-depth interviews with representatives of three important stakeholder communities: appraisers, assessors, and the state Department of Revenue’s Bureau of Local Assessment. Results from the workshops and interviews were incorporated into a draft of the business plan. The plan also

included information concerning the costs and benefits, both anecdotal and quantified, of developing statewide standardized parcel mapping. The plan further summarizes requirements for successful project implementation, identifies implementation risks, provides an implementation plan, and identifies criteria for measuring success. A draft of the plan was circulated for comment by stakeholders. To-date, the key success of the plan has been the dialog it has enabled with the DOR-Bureau of Local Assessment (BLA). The chief of the DOR-BLA has indicated she is willing to support a key recommendation of the plan which is having her agency recommend that communities conform to the MassGIS' digital parcel standard as the "best practice" for assessor parcel mapping. Work on standardized parcel mapping is already funded. However, this will be a multi-year project; full funding is not guaranteed. Therefore, MassGIS views the plan as key for supporting future funding requests needed to complete the project.

### **Project Narrative**

MassGIS staff launched the project by conducting a series of seven "workshops" (one more than the originally proposed six) around the state to present the idea of standardized statewide assessor parcel mapping and its related benefits. Approximately 215 people attended these events and provided useful insights. MassGIS also conducted a competitive procurement to retain a consultant for the project. In addition, working with the consultant, MassGIS staff conducted in-depth interviews with representatives of three important stakeholder communities: appraisers, assessors, and the state Department of Revenue's Bureau of Local Assessment. Drawing on years of efforts to obtain funding for this project, MassGIS staff also assembled information on anecdotal and quantified benefits of standardized parcel mapping as well as information costs to complete the project. Drawing on information from the workshops, interviews, and materials provided by MassGIS, and on their own expertise, the consultant produced a draft of the plan. The draft was circulated to stakeholders. MassGIS director, Christian Jacqz, and the project's Principle Investigator, Neil MacGaffey, held an additional meeting with the chief of the Bureau of Local Assessment, the Commission of the Department of Revenue, and the Deputy Commissioner for Local Affairs. A final version of the plan has been produced and is being circulated.

### Key accomplishments to date

About 215 people attended 7 workshops held at locations around the state. Workshop attendees included many individuals that we regularly encounter in various outreach contexts. However, they also included many individuals from the smaller and less developed communities that we have not previously encountered; these are the communities that will benefit the most from state funding for developing standardized digital parcels that will be guided by this business plan. Working with the consultant, MassGIS staff conducted in-depth interviews with representatives of three important stakeholder communities: appraisers, assessors, and the state Department of Revenue's Bureau of Local Assessment. The project's Principal Investigator, Neil MacGaffey and MassGIS' Director, Christian Jacqz, participated in a second interview with the Department of Revenue's Bureau of Local Assessment, concerning their role in ensuring maintenance of standardized digital parcel maps. The process of developing this plan has clearly succeeded in elevating the importance of standardized parcel mapping to the upper levels of state government,

as both the Commission of the Department of Revenue, and the Deputy Commissioner for Local Affairs attended this second meeting.

### How inclusive is your effort?

We launched the project in April of 2010, by scheduling seven workshops around the state targeting stakeholder groups and in particular municipal assessors. We publicized these workshops widely through list serves and other electronic outlets, including contact with the relevant professional organizations, covering groups as diverse as municipal assessors, real estate appraisers, surveyors, regional planners, and municipal GIS staff. We also worked to publicize the workshops through county-level assessor organizations as the smaller and less developed communities tend to participate more in those organizations than in the state-level organization. We are not aware of any relevant stakeholder groups that we have not contacted and based on attendance at the workshops and the level of engagement of the attendees, this process has been very successful.

In addition, we made a presentation on the parcel mapping project and business plan at the annual summer conference of the Massachusetts Association of Assessing Officers; the presentation including preliminary findings from the seven workshops. As described in our original proposal, we also conducted in-depth interviews with the key stakeholders: the Massachusetts Department of Revenue, Bureau of Local Affairs; the Massachusetts Board of Real Estate Appraisers, and the Executive Committee of the Massachusetts Association of Assessing Officers. The business plan includes a summary of these interviews as an Appendix. We are also working closely with the State 911 Department as they are funding a significant portion of the project to standardize assessor tax mapping as part of developing the GIS data needed for the Commonwealth's Next Generation E-911 capability.

### What practices or activities led to success?

Our extensive outreach to, and support for, municipal assessors both before and as part of publicizing the planning effort have worked well as the assessing community has generally responded favorably to our initiatives to plan for standardized tax mapping and to implement that plan. The key here is broad publicity and multiple options for people to respond to what you are doing or are planning to do.

### What practices or activities have not?

We were not as successful as we would have liked in obtaining comments on drafts of our business plan. Part of the problem is that one of the participating stakeholder groups did not delegate the responsibility for responding to reviewing the plan. Another stakeholder group is a private sector group and their representative, while happy to participate in the interview process, simply did not have the time needed to respond to the draft plan.

### **Next Steps**

We are now in the first of three years implementing this project, with funding commitments already made for the second year. The work completed in the past six months plus the existing

funding commitments will enable us to standardize assessor mapping in about 70% of the state's cities and towns. A key challenge identified in the plan will be ensuring that once the assessor mapping is standardized that it is maintained in that form by the communities. We will address that challenge in the fall of 2011 by hiring a project manager whose focus will include ensuring that maintenance of the standardized data does occur; this person's efforts will be supplemented by between one-quarter and one-half of an existing staff person's time plus time from MassGIS's Assistant Director.

### **Attachments**

The business plan resulting from this project ("Statewide Parcel Data Development and Maintenance for the Commonwealth of Massachusetts") was previously submitted on June 15, 2011.

### **Feedback on Cooperative Agreements Program**

Having these sorts of planning grants available has been very useful for MassGIS and they are funded at about the right level for this sort of work. The quality of the templates for the CAP program planning documents is excellent. The FGDC and USGS support staffs are a pleasure to work with. The CAP program's biggest weakness is the complexity of the process for handling financial transactions between the state and the federal funding agency; this has been a nightmare. The administrative work involved for these small grants is way out of proportion to the money involved. For us to apply again for a CAP grant, either the money involved will have to increase by an order of magnitude or the administrative barriers will have to be significantly lowered; it's simply not worth the administrative effort for the sums of money involved.