



GIGa: Local Government Technology Innovation Awards

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Friday was a great day. Along with about 100 other people, I attended the GIGa Innovation Showcase and Awards Luncheon at the Quorum Center in Raleigh.

GIGa stands for the [Government Innovation Grant Awards](#) and the first set of awards for local government technology innovation were announced on Friday. These annual awards are a project of the School's Center for Public Technology with support from the Local Government Federal Credit Union and NC Local Government Information Systems Association (NCLGSA).

They are the brainchild of Shannon Tufts, who created the program "to spur and reward technology-based innovation across governments in North Carolina by offering incentives to those governments engaged in innovative, repeatable endeavors which help improve citizen services by increasing efficiencies, effectiveness, and possibly creating cost savings." By shining a light on innovative local government technology, the Center hopes to "elevate the importance of technology in the public sector."

The event started with a keynote presentation by [Dan Heath](#) on how to bring about change in organizations. His talk was based on the book [Switch: How to Change Things When Change is Hard](#), a best-seller that he co-authored with his brother, Chip. The book draws on social science research to identify why change is hard and then it offers practical strategies for bringing about change. The writing by the Heath brothers reminds me of Malcolm Gladwell's work. They take



academic research and make it accessible and useful in ways that the academics either can't do or won't do. It was a terrific presentation. Getting Dan Heath for the GIGa event was a coup and it sent a strong signal to the city and county IT professionals?you are important and valuable enough to merit a high profile national speaker.

After lunch, the finalists for the awards made presentations about their innovations so that everyone could learn from one another. There was a grand prize award of \$10,000 and two awards of \$2500. The grand prize went to Catawba County for implementation of a Building Permit QR (Quick Response) Codes system, which "provides building contractors and inspectors with up-to-the-minute job site and inspection information at their fingertips, in the field. The county added QR codes to building services permit placards posted at job sites in order to quickly deliver data via use of a smart phone. The placard codes link to GIS information for the parcel of the building site, and to full permit information on the web. All data is live and dynamic. 'Using QR codes on building permit placards has reduced the amount of staff time required by inspectors and permit specialists. And the process is easily duplicated in a number of areas,' says Steve Lackey, Catawba County systems analyst. 'We now also use QR codes in job advertisements and in our libraries.'"

Another outcome of the GIGa program will be an annual "State of the State of Technology" compendium, featuring all governmental submissions and offering promising practices for local governments to model and implement.

Shannon and her colleagues in the Center, Maurice Ferrell and Stacey Hypes, do many things to encourage and support often overlooked and underappreciated technology professionals working in local government. The GIGa awards are just the latest example of how they are helping to build a strong community of IT professionals across North Carolina. Kudos to Shannon and her colleagues for this innovative approach to supporting the work of public officials. Special thanks to our friends at the Local Government Federal Credit Union for their financial support (and thanks to Ann Simpson for her help).