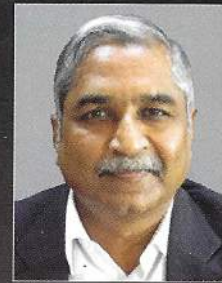


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TOWARDS CREATING AN e-GOV ARMY



"We have successfully launched the first-ever free online certification programme in e-Governance in India, which has been made mandatory for all DIT staff, SeMT members, consultants and other stakeholders working with the state government," says **Rajesh Aggarwa**, Secretary, DIT, Government of Maharashtra, in conversation with Nikita Apraj

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lease brief us about the structure and nature of the e-Governance course.

This unique certification programme in e-Governance tests an individual's skill and knowledge on e-Governance. It is mandatory for all DIT staff, SeMT staff, consultants and software developers (System Analysts, Business Analysts and Project Leads) working with the Government of Maharashtra. We also recommend this certification for all stakeholders working on e-Governance projects anywhere in India. The programme is open for all. Reading material and links of important sites are provided on the website, which facilitates learning of basic and fundamental concepts of e-Governance. Another unique feature of the program is that it is an open book test. The focus is not on mugging up definitions, but understanding concepts and being able to appreciate and apply in them real scenarios. The participants can read and search on the net, but are expected to articulate the responses in their own words. The course consists of two parts—the first part is an online written test which contains objective as well as subjective questions and the second part is an interview which will be held through Skype or Google Hangouts, or face-to-face.

Why did you feel the need of an e-Governance course?

I have been seeing the e-Governance programmes in the country for more than a decade. While in Delhi during 1998-2009, I was a frequent visitor to DIT of the Government of India. There I got opportunity to interact with many people from various walks of life. I felt that too many consultants have got into e-Governance programme and it has become more complicated than necessary. Last year, as Secretary, DIT, Government of Maharashtra, I attended a conference on e-Governance in another state. Everybody there was talking about e-Gov 2.0. I said rather than 2.0, let's talk about 0.0. Let's begin from absolute fundamentals. After a few days, I wrote a paper called 'e-Gov 0.0—Fundamentals of e-Governance'. It's a 25-page document written in very simple language emphasising upon many important aspects of e-Governance. Many people across the coun-

try read it and found it more educating than websites and big books on the subject. From that point onwards, I wanted to train people, at least consultants working in Maharashtra, in aspects of e-Governance.

How did you decide on the syllabus and course content? What is the core objective of the course?

Though we all talk about recycling software, using common infrastructure and not re-inventing the wheel, there is no formal mechanism to ensure that it is done. Many consultants across the country prepare huge reports and every time, when RFP (Request for Proposal) comes up, again emphasis is on new hardware and software. Rightly or wrongly, consultants have become pivotal point in all e-Governance programmes. It is they who define the scope of work. Thus it was necessary to start with them. Even in Government of India mandated e-Governance programmes, e-Governance standards are not followed. In e-District project across the country, there is no uniformity in ways of writing a person's name and gender or even writing days of week. The idea of e-Governance Training Programme emanates from all of this. If consultants and decision-makers from various departments are made aware of standards of e-Governance, it will result in huge savings by usage of common infra, and sharing of source code, database structures, and actual data. The objective of the programme is not to pass or fail. It is to increase the level of awareness and skills in the field of e-Governance.

"The objective of the programme is not to pass or fail. It is to increase the level of awareness and skills"

How did the people respond to the course?

We have become the first and for now, the only state to offer virtual course on e-Governance. Over a weekend, I prepared this online exam

"Even in the Govt. of India mandated e-Gov programmes, e-Gov standards are not followed"

which contains objective and subjective questions and an interview. We did not spend much on software, and instead took annual subscription to Classmarker and SurveyMonkey, and use free Skype and Google Hangout tools. The response we got is phenomenal. We have created a special site for the course - 'http://egovtraining.maharashtra.gov.in'. So far we have received 472 registrations out of which 299 people appeared for the exam and 110 were able to clear the exam. Around 14 participants did outstandingly well and have been declared as mentors for future batches, while around 40 people have passed with distinction. The certificates are being sent through email to the successful candidates.

How was your experience of conducting the first batch?

The participants came from all walks of life. There are government officers, consultants working with consultant firms and journalists as well. Of the 110 successful candidates, we have declared 14 people as mentors. In future batches, they will as a team help me to create the exam, check it and take interviews. Those who have not passed with distinction or have not passed can retake the test in future batches. Almost all the leading consulting firms in the country like KPMG, PWC, and Accenture have said they will make it mandatory for all their consultants across the country to pass this exam. Now we have more than 100 people who have certified as 'Good e-Gov Practitioners'. I can guarantee that a person with a grade of distinction or mentor will do a great job in the field of e-Governance.

What are your plans about the course in near future?

Registrations for Batch 2 were opened last week, and exam is now on. We are slightly tweaking the procedure in Batch 2. We are increasing the question bank. In next two to three cycles,

we will mature further. The course will become more of self-evaluating type. Simultaneously, on the other hand, we are empanelling software vendors for small, medium and big jobs. It is very unfortunate that across the country, only few big firms have got most of e-Governance projects as terms in RFP favour only big firms. Even small projects worth ₹5-10 crore have gone to big firms. Thus, over a decade, rather than developing a huge army of software programmers and hundreds of entrepreneurs working for e-Governance, we have only a handful of big firms getting all the projects, who on the sly have off many parts to smaller firms. We are encouraging small and medium entrepreneurs with the help of NASSCOM. We are also encouraging individual entrepreneurs. We have started an

"We have started an online 'always-on' empanelment process through where small, new firms can start with small projects and grow big"

online 'always-on' empanelment process through which we offer small, new firms an opportunity to start with small project and grow big.

This registration or empanelment process will also have an element of mentoring programmers for e-Governance standards and framework. The training will be free for small and medium firms.

All firms irrespective of their size have to follow standards of e-Governance and get their resources certified in e-Governance. Only then they will be considered for e-Governance projects in Maharashtra. For government employees, we will have more of self-certification kind of courses.

I hope NISG and NeGD would officially adopt the programme. Within Maharashtra, we are rolling it out well and fast. We plan to roll out advanced modules specialised for programmers, consultants and other stakeholders. We will have special courses for different verticals. Team of mentors will come handy here. This team will make the course self-sustainable. 