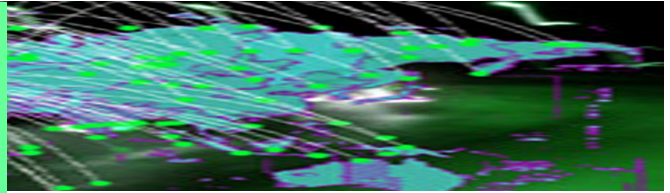


ALTERNATIVE SERVICE DELIVERY



Since the early 1990s, political and public service leaders have increasingly pursued improved service to citizens by adopting alternative service delivery (ASD) arrangements. ASD can also produce such benefits as greater client satisfaction and cost savings.

What is Alternative Service Delivery?

ASD is a creative and dynamic process that involves changes in the form of existing public sector organizations or the design of new forms of organization and is sometimes referred to as “restructuring” and “organizational innovation.” An example of the former approach is the transformation of an existing government department into a government corporation. An example of the “new forms” approach is the creation of a “single-window” service-delivery organization. In many ASD arrangements, public sector organizations share their governance functions with business firms, community groups and/or other public organizations.

The pursuit of ASD arrangements has been closely tied to the New Public Management (NPM) movement, with its emphasis on innovative approaches to service delivery. NPM stresses the importance of governments doing the “steering,” while leaving much of the “rowing” (the delivery of services) to non-governmental entities or to collaborative arrangements between governmental and non-governmental entities. Taken together, ASD arrangements involve a wide range of public and private sector actors that are subject to varying degrees of independence from government control. Countries as dissimilar as Canada, Jamaica, Kazakhstan, Latvia, Peru and Tanzania have undertaken ASD initiatives.

Types of Alternative Service Delivery

ASD is commonly viewed as entailing alternatives to the traditional departmental or ministry structure of government. Some of these alternatives, such as public corporations, mixed enterprises, contracting out, and privatization, have long been used by governments and are well known to the general public. Other alternatives, such as service agencies, partnerships, employee takeovers, and single-window delivery mechanisms, have been used relatively infrequently in the past. A brief note on each of these latter alternatives will illustrate the variety of possible ASD arrangements.

In several countries, there has been innovative use of service agencies that enjoy various degrees of autonomy from government control. Especially notable here are the many executive agencies now operating in the United Kingdom and employing a very large percentage of the central government’s public servants. Canada has created both service agencies (e.g. the Canada Revenue Agency), which have considerable autonomy from departmental control, and special operating agencies (e.g. the Passport Office), which receive greater autonomy to manage their resources but which remain as part of a government department.

Partnerships are a very popular type of ASD. They can take a remarkable variety of innovative forms and can involve a wide range of participants, including public organizations at different levels of government, business firms, charitable organizations, voluntary organizations and labor unions. Partnerships between governments and nongovernmental actors can help achieve such objectives as improved service delivery, reduced costs and economic productivity.

An increasingly popular type of ASD is the single-window approach to service delivery. This approach brings together government services so that citizens can access them more rapidly and efficiently. The purpose is to provide seamless service across government departments or even across governments. Moreover, the services can be delivered through one or more of the main delivery channels — the telephone, the Internet or walk-in centers. Contracting out has traditionally involved a contractual agreement with a private sector organization to deliver a government service for a specified period of time, with the government keeping responsibility for effective service. Employee takeovers are a newer form of contracting out that involves contracting with a former government employee, or employees, to deliver a service previously delivered directly by the government.



