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By **Lori Kurtzman***The Columbus Dispatch* • Friday June 14, 2013 5:29 AM

One agency has a temperature-controlled, fire-resistant data center. Another keeps its servers in a closet.

So why not link the two and share?

That's the question some local agencies and governments are exploring through a \$93,000 grant from the Ohio Local Government Innovation Fund. The nine partners in the Central Ohio Public Sector IT Partnership have begun studying ways they can share everything from email services and server hardware to phone systems and technical support.

They estimated in their grant proposal that collaboration could reduce information-technology costs by 30 percent, or \$2.7 million. Their study is set to conclude in midsummer.

"At a time when resources are constantly being cut, how can we take what we have and make the most of it?" said Bret Longberry, director of the Metropolitan Educational Council's Information Technology Center, which provides technology services to area public schools and is acting as the lead agency in the partnership.

A solution, the group said, lies in the collaboration of diverse public-sector entities, including the cities of Dublin, Grandview Heights, Upper Arlington and Westerville; Prairie Township; Metro Parks; the Educational Service Center of Central Ohio; and the Mid-Ohio Regional Planning Commission.

The abilities range widely among partners: Dublin and Westerville have more sophisticated operations, while Grandview's fire chief handles its IT services. Longberry's agency has an advanced data center, while across the parking lot, the Educational Service Center has nowhere special to house its servers. The organizations began discussing a partnership more than a year ago, securing the state grant on its second attempt.

"It makes a lot of sense," said MORPC spokeswoman Laura Koprowski, who noted, along with Longberry, that the study and collaboration likely is to extend beyond IT operations.

lkurtzman@dispatch.com

@LoriKurtzman

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