

How can we help you?

A toolkit for establishing a local government one stop desk

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Local governments across the world consider high quality service delivery to their citizens as one of their first and foremost tasks. VNG International has supported numerous local governments in achieving this goal by establishing so-called 'one stop desks', considered to be one of the most effective and efficient instruments for citizen-friendly service delivery. This toolkit presents the step-by-step approach VNG International has developed over the years in various projects, mainly in Central and Eastern Europe. Its final objective being the creation of fully operational one stop desks wherever these may be needed.

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A toolkit for establishing a local government one stop desk



Colophon

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Table of contents

Introduction 6

- 1 What is a one stop desk?
 - 2 Why do we need a one stop desk?
 - 3 VNG International's step-by-step approach

Step 1 Creating support for a one stop desk 8

- 1 Political support
- 2 Organisational support
- 3 Citizen support and participation
- 4 Support from other authorities

Step 2 Establishing a project organisation 13

- 1 Listing of involved parties
- 2 Project team
- 3 Steering group
- 4 Project plan
- 5 Budget plan
- 6 Communication plan
- 7 Risk analysis

Step 3 Reorganising the municipal organisation 20

- 1 Selection of services and products
- 2 Process analysis
- 3 Front office and back office
- 4 Embedding the one stop desk in the organisation
- 5 Organising feedback

Step 4 Creating a qualified staff 26

- 1 Job description
- 2 Training staff

Step 5 Building the one stop desk 30

- 1 Finding the right location
- 2 Designing the one stop desk
- 3 ICT hardware and software

Step 6 Assuring sustainability 33

Summary 34

Introduction

In countries all over the world governments are working to improve the relationship with and services for their citizens. In the modern view of the role of governments, the government is there to serve the citizens and not the other way around. This is especially important for local governments because they are the government closest to the citizens.

All local governments deliver services and products to their citizens, although the number and nature may differ. Whatever service is delivered, its quality is of utmost importance for the relationship between a local government and its citizens. An effective, efficient, and qualitative service delivery is generally regarded as the first condition for a good, democratic relationship between the local government and its citizens. One stop desks are regarded as a highly effective method for such a service delivery. They organise the process of service delivery in a manner that best suits citizens' needs.

1 What is a one stop desk?

A one stop desk is an office where citizens can go to obtain or ask for local government products and services. Other descriptions of a one stop desk are 'public information centre', 'municipal shop' or 'municipal store'. However a public information centre implies that only information and no product can be obtained, while municipal shop or store implies that customers have the liberty to buy or not to buy a product, like in a normal store. This is mostly not the case in a one stop desk since it enjoys monopoly of the product.

Thus, in this publication we use the terminology 'one stop desk' as this refers to the system of helping citizens. The basic principle of the one stop desk is that a citizen can obtain the desired product or service, ideally, with one visit. The philosophy behind this principle is that a local government should put the needs and desires of the citizens first and build the organisation and processes around this philosophy.

A one stop desk can be electronic, thus accessible through internet, or physical. In this toolkit we focus on the physical desk, since there is a greater demand for a physical than for an electronic desk.

2 Why do we need a one stop desk?

There are several reasons why a one stop desk might be useful for your local government organisation:

- It improves the quality of the service delivery of your local government.
- It improves the relationship between the local government and its citizens.
- It organises the contacts between citizens and the local government organisation more efficiently and effectively.

There are many instruments that either improve the quality of the services, or the relationship with citizens, or that restructure your organisation to work more effectively and efficiently, but there is only one instrument that combines all this: The one stop desk.

3 VNG International's step-by-step approach

This toolkit has been developed according to a step-by-step approach. This consists of six steps and provides logical progression from the situation in which there is no organised structure of service delivery to one culminating in an established one stop desk. VNG International has developed this approach and implemented it in numerous projects all over the world.

The following chapters examine each step in detail and provide further information and hands-on tools on how to implement and accomplish that step. The basic steps are:

- 1 Creating support for a one stop desk
- 2 Establishing a project organisation
- 3 Reorganising the municipal organisation
- 4 Creating a qualified staff
- 5 Building the one stop desk
- 6 Assuring sustainability

To make the step-by step approach concrete, examples are provided from the Czech municipality of Moravská Třebová (12,000 inhabitants and administrative centre of a region of 30,000 inhabitants) and the Ukrainian municipality of Romny (50,000 inhabitants). Both have established such a one stop desk with support of VNG International and their twinning partner, the Dutch municipality of Vlaardingen. The knowledge, experiences, and do's and don'ts gained in establishing one stop desks in these local governments have been used as examples and guides in this toolkit.

THE AUTHORS

Jan Hecker (1957) is senior civil servant for strategy and international relations at the Dutch municipality of Vlaardingen. As such he has been responsible for implementing several projects in and with Moravská Třebová, the Czech twinning partner of Vlaardingen, including the establishment of a one stop desk. Jan Hecker used the knowledge and experience gained to support the establishment of a one stop desk in Romny, the Ukrainian twinning partner of Vlaardingen and Moravská Třebová. As VNG International expert, he has delivered numerous trainings to local governments in Central and Eastern Europe on establishing one stop desks.

Miroslav Netolický (1975) is Manager for Economic Development in the Czech municipality of Moravská Třebová. As project leader he was responsible for establishing the one stop desk in his local government organisation in co-operation with Vlaardingen. As expert of VNG International, Miroslav Netolický provided trainings and consultancy advice on improving local government service provision for staff in Ukraine, Kaliningrad, and Georgia. In co-operation with Jan Hecker, he supported the establishment of a one stop desk in Romny, the twinning partner of both Moravská Třebová and Vlaardingen.

Step 1

Creating support for a one stop desk

The establishment of a one step desk will mean a change in the working methods of a local government. To make this process a success, broad support from all relevant stakeholders is essential. If this support is not (fully) present at the start of the process it should be strongly encouraged and organised. This step explains how to create political, organisational, and citizen support as well as support from other authorities.

1 Political support

The first and most important step is to get support of the political leadership of the local government. Without their approval the process cannot start. If they need to be convinced or better informed why this process is desirable, the following activities might be of help:

- Organise an excursion to let the politicians experience for themselves what the problems are that citizens face when they want a particular service from their local government organisation.
- Provide the leadership with articles in newspapers and magazines about modern service delivery and client friendliness.
- Organise a meeting with experts on modern service delivery or involve people who have worked in situations both with and without a one stop desk.
- Organise discussions with citizens that show how they value competent service delivery and client friendliness of local government staff.
- Check if there are national or international grants or subsidies available to (co)finance the establishment of the one stop desk. It is much easier for a politician to agree when the money involved is only modest.
- Find links with other similar developments, such as public administration reform.
- Ask other relevant local governments in the region or, if available, the twinning partner of your local government, to share their experiences.

The public administration reforms of 2003 in the Czech Republic delegated responsibilities from district to local level. Moravská Třebová used this to combine proposed changes with their desire to improve local government service delivery. As part of the the reforms, Moravská Třebová received money for a new building that proved to be a superb location for the one stop desk.

The Dutch municipality of Vlaardingen shared their experiences with Moravská Třebová in establishing a one stop desk. These local governments have enjoyed a twinning relationship since 1992 mainly targeting co-operation between local government organisations.

2 Organisational support

If political support is assured, support within the local government organisation needs to be created. Most activities mentioned to create political support can be used to create organisational support as well. Another effective activity to create organisational support is to ask the management of local government organisations to analyse the steps necessary to deliver one specific service and demonstrate how the process can be improved.

To help make local government staff of Romny enthusiastic for the idea of a one stop desk brain storm sessions were organised for people to express their ideas. For an effective and efficient brainstorm everybody was encouraged to express their ideas, without any judgement from others about them in order to avoid discouraging individual creativity. The leader of the brainstorm sessions maintained this rule strictly. The brainstorm session, as creative process of generating ideas, was followed by a critical analytical phase that resulted inter alia in the identification of the competences needed by staff of the one stop desk.

Organisational support is essential for the success of establishing a one stop desk. In practice, some resistance within the organisation might occur since the process involves some reorganisation of the local government organisation. There are several reasons for such resistance:

- **Fear:** Employees fear change as they think it will put them in a worse position than before.
- **Disagreement about the chosen direction:** Employees may have an opinion that differs from the management decision.
- **Not invented here:** Employees tend to trust own ideas better than those of others.
- **Distrust of 'strange' ideas:** Many people tend to distrust ideas with which they are not familiar.
- **Not involved:** Employees not involved in changes may distrust management and suspect a 'secret plan' behind them. By involving employees and encouraging them to 'take ownership' resistance is reduced.
- **Bad management:** Managers who do not properly communicate a new process or do not listen to others' ideas tend to encourage resistance to them.

There are several ways to deal with resistance:

- **Communicate** the goals of change, its necessity, and its possibilities by organising meetings, providing presentations, or visiting places where it has been done already.
- **Use a participatory approach:** Involve all relevant employees in the process and give room for them to present their ideas, for instance in brainstorming sessions.
- **Offer support and facilities** to reduce the resistance caused by the changes.
- **Negotiate** and discuss openly with employees: you win some, you lose some.

Civil servants in Moravská Třebová were curious about the creation of the one stop desk, but hesitant to take an active part in its creation. Thus, the project team and the city manager held interactive meetings to inform staff about the goals, benefits and challenges involved. The civil servants were stimulated to give their opinion and to contribute to the process. This reduced the hesitation of the staff and turned many into ambassadors of a one stop desk.

3 Citizen support and participation

Citizens are the main beneficiaries of the one stop desk. Thus it is essential that they participate in the process of its establishment. We define seven levels of participation, using the qualification of Sherry Arnstein.

Degree	Type of participation	Description	Useful for
Non-participation	Manipulation	Citizens are educated and persuaded by the local government on their policy and not the other way around	The proposed plan is the best and the job of participation is to achieve public support
Tokenism	Informing	Information is given, opinions are not requested. One way communication	Matters that cannot be changed, e.g. because of compelling national law. Also for matters that cause strong opposition. In that case leadership is necessary
	Consulting	The citizens give advice about a proposal eg through enquiries, surveys, citizens meetings	Useful for matters that are important for citizens who are critical about it
	Placation	Citizens are picked to become member of committees (housing or education committee)	Receive input from first hand
Citizen power	Partnership	Citizens help formulate policies together with civil servants. Private organisations are involved as partners	Citizens consider the final result as partly their own work. This helps prevent objections later in the process
	Delegated powers	Citizens hold a clear majority of seats in committees with delegated powers to make decisions	Housing co-operation
	Citizens control	Organisations of citizens design plans and projects themselves and then ask local governments to join them	Useful for projects that need broad support from society. The local government should be willing to refrain from taking a dominant role

For the realisation of a one stop desk, 'partnership' is probably the most desirable process. It maximises citizen motivation, it brings in the expertise of local government, and it allows citizens to provide useful information and feedback for instance as to how the physical one stop desk might look, what services are most desired, what facilities should be available and so on.

In Moravská Třebová two forms of citizen participation were used; a questionnaire (consultation) and a public hearing (partnership). The questionnaire showed that 48 percent of inhabitants were not satisfied with the way they were served by the town hall. 53 percent considered the establishment of a one stop desk 'a major improvement in service delivery'. One year after its establishment a new questionnaire was held in which 88 percent of citizens expressed satisfaction with service delivery. At the public hearing citizens could give their input and opinion what the one stop desk should look like.

In Romny, with its approximately 50,000 inhabitants and much larger size than Moravská Třebová, the existing 'quarter' committees proved valuable. This infrastructure of committees was used to inform citizens about plans and to listen to their ideas (consulting).

4 Support from other authorities

In some countries laws and regulations make it necessary for a local government to receive approval from the national government in the establishing of a one stop desk. It is true to say that support of the national government is useful in any case, for instance in applying for subsidies.

For the opening of the one stop desk in Romny, the local government held a ceremony for its citizens, the provincial authorities and regional mayors. A high representative of the Czech embassy in Kiev participated in the celebrations as well as in underlining the success of the project. This high profile event gave Romny the status of innovative town in Ukraine.

Step 2

Establishing a project organisation

When support of all stakeholders is assured and the political leadership has given formal approval, the real work can start to establish the one stop desk. The second key step in this process is to create the project organisation responsible. A detailed list of all involved parties is made, a project team and steering group are established, and a project plan is developed containing objectives, results, and an activity schedule. Other essential elements include a budget plan, communication plan, and a risk analysis.

1 Listing of involved parties

First, a list should be made of all parties involved in the establishment of the one stop desk. The following parties may be involved:

- Politician responsible for service delivery.
- Politician responsible for the local government organisation.
- City manager or one of the other top managers.
- Expert on process analysis and organisational matters.
- Expert on ICT.
- Expert on HRM.
- Expert on the products and services to be delivered by the one stop desk.
- Expert on purchasing and contracting (for hardware and software).
- Expert on laws and regulations.

It is also advisable to have citizens participate in this second step by having local government create a citizens' focus group made up of interested participants that are consulted and give advice on a regular basis. It is important to keep this group fully informed at all times. When the citizens' focus group gives advice, the project organisation should keep it informed as to what has been done with the advice in practice.

2 Project team

The day-to-day work should be done by a project team consisting of people most involved in the establishment of the one stop desk. This group should be chaired by a project manager who should be a top-level civil servant trusted by both politicians and management of the local government organisation. He or she should be able to:

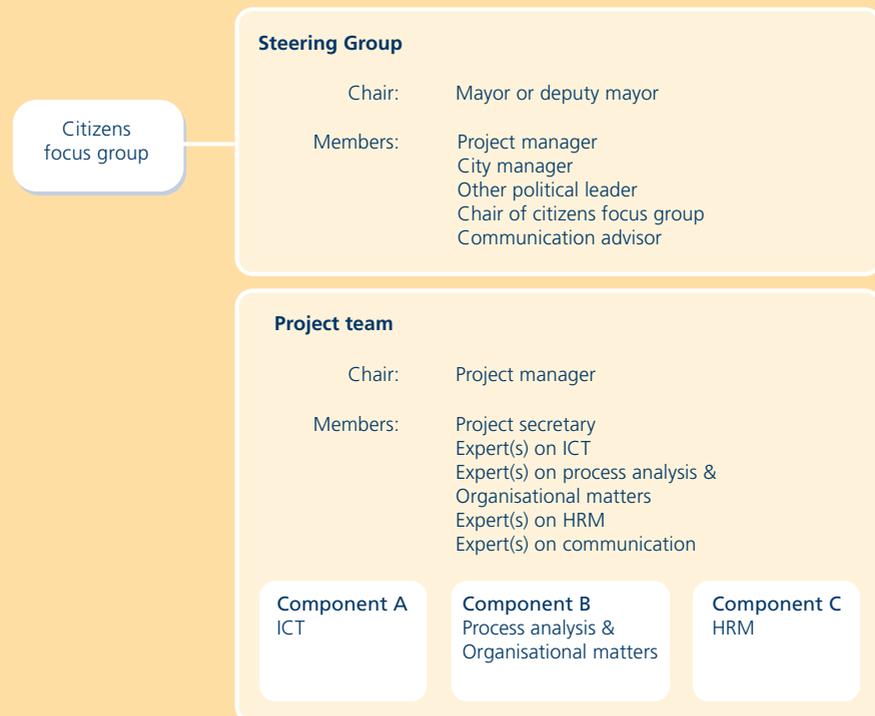
- Convincingly formulate the vision of the one stop desk.
- Recruit the right people for the various tasks.
- Persuade heads of departments to make their people available for the project.
- Implement organisational changes with the support of the heads of departments.

The recruitment of the project team members deserves special attention. They will have to combine their normal daily responsibilities with the project's activities. Once an employee works on such a project he will have two bosses: His head of department and the project manager. This may cause conflicts of interest and result in stress and actual conflict. The project manager should agree with the head of a person's department about the number of hours they may work on the project. All involved should be aware of signals that an employee is under too much stress.

3 Steering group

Besides the project team a steering group can be formed. This group is chaired by the mayor or deputy mayor who is politically responsible for the project. One of the members should be the project team manager. Further members can be other politicians, the city manager, a communication advisor, the chair of the citizens' focus group. A steering group meets on a regular basis, (but not too often). It makes decisions on strategic matters, informs the local government council, and supervises progress of the work.

Example of a project organisation:



4 Project plan

The project plan is the leading document that explains the process of establishing the one stop desk. A project plan can be developed under step 1 'creating support' as well to receive approval from the local government council to establish a one stop desk. The development of this project plan is the responsibility of the project manager in co-operation with his team. The plan should be approved by the steering group before it can be rolled-out.

A project plan consists of the following elements:

- **Objective:** The objective describes the goal of the project. What it should achieve. For instance: On January 2012, a one stop desk with five services is fully functioning.
- **Results:** An objective consists of several results. Results give information what needs to be realised to achieve the objective. For instance:
 - > *Result 1* | A location is furnished and equipped with hard and software to serve as one stop desk.
 - > *Result 2* | A front and back office are established.
 - > *Result 3* | Five civil servants are trained to work at the one stop desk (front office).
 - > *Result 4* | Three services are available to be delivered by the one stop desk.
- **Activities:** Each result is achieved by implementing several activities. The step-by-step approach presented in this toolkit roughly describes the activities that need to be implemented. For a proper activity planning however it is necessary to indicate the timing and deadline for each step and the responsible person. A short, incomplete, example of an activity schedule is provided below:

Activity schedule			
Activity	Description	Deadline	Responsible
<i>A (part of result 1)</i>	Purchasing furniture	March 2011	Project manager
<i>B (part of result 2)</i>	Developing job descriptions for the front office staff	May 2011	Expert on HRM
<i>C (part of result 3)</i>	Training on client friendliness for 5 front office staff	June 2011	Expert on HRM
<i>D (part of result 4)</i>	Conducting brain storm sessions for selecting 3 services to be delivered by the one stop desk	September 2011	Expert on process management
<i>E (part of result ...)</i>

The project plan consists furthermore of a budget plan, communication plan and risk analysis. They are described in the next paragraphs.

5 Budget plan

For the establishment of a one stop desk money is needed both for its creation and sustainable operation. A budget plan contains of the following elements:

- **Investment** (once-only costs):
 - > Acquisition of the building (if a special building is bought for the one stop desk).
 - > Refurbishing the building (building counters, contracting works, furniture, etcetera).
 - > Special equipment (computers, system for registration of clients)
 - > Investment in software.
 - > Network to connect front and back office.
 - > External advice.
 - > Training costs of staff.
 - > Communication costs, costs of organising citizen participation.
- **Annual exploitation costs:**
 - > Renting building or rooms.
 - > Maintenance.
 - > Wages for staff.
 - > Training for staff.
 - > Software licenses.
 - > Electricity, heating.
 - > Communication, printed matters, etcetera.
 - > Other costs to run an office.

Not all elements may be applicable and many of the above mentioned costs (especially the annual exploitation costs) need not be extra costs. If work processes are being reorganised no extra staff is needed, only the working method changes. If it is possible to have the one stop desk in an existing building there are no extra housing costs. Sound financial exploitation takes into account that some investments have a short life. Especially computers and software tend to be outdated quickly. A depreciation period of three or four years can be normal, which means that new computers and software have to be purchased. For this reason a long term financial plan is helpful. An example of a budget plan for a one stop desk is provided below (the amounts are fictional).

Budget plan of a one stop desk

Year of investment 2009

Investments	Total	Life time	Depreciation per year
Acquisition of the building	€ 250.000	50	€ 5.000
Refurbishing the building	€ 150.000	10	€ 15.000
Computers etcetera	€ 10.000	3	€ 3.333
Software	€ 10.000	3	€ 3.333
Network costs	€ 50.000	10	€ 5.000
External advice	€ 50.000	10	€ 5.000
Training costs staff	€ 20.000	10	€ 2.000
Communication costs	€ 10.000	10	€ 1.000
Total investment	€ 550.000		€ 39.667

Annual exploitation	2009	2010	2011	2012
Interest (5% of total investment) and depreciation		€ 67.167	€ 65.183	€ 63.200
Maintenance costs	€ 2.000	€ 5.000	€ 7.000	€ 10.000
Staff salaries	€ 100.000	€ 100.000	€ 100.000	€ 100.000
Training costs staff		€ 5.000	€ 5.000	€ 5.000
Software licenses		€ 2.000	€ 2.000	€ 2.000
Electricity and heating	€ 8.000	€ 8.000	€ 8.000	€ 8.000
Communication costs		€ 1.000	€ 4.000	€ 1.000
Other costs	€ 5.000	€ 4.000	€ 4.000	€ 5.000
Total costs per year	€ 115.000	€ 192.167	€ 195.183	€ 194.200

Already in the budget

Wages for staff	€ 100.000	€ 100.000	€ 100.000	€ 100.000
Training costs		€ 5.000	€ 5.000	€ 5.000
Other costs	€ 2.000	€ 4.000	€ 4.000	€ 5.000
Total	€ 102.000	€ 109.000	€ 109.000	€ 110.000
Remaining per year	€ 13.000	€ 83.167	€ 86.183	€ 84.200

6 Communication plan

To generate and maintain support for establishing a one stop desk proper communication is essential. A communication plan helps to structure and target the communication. A communication plan pays attention to:

- Content: What is the story to be told?
- Target group: Which people should be informed?
- Intention: What do I want to achieve?
- Medium: What tools should be used?
- Effect: What are the expected results?

Content	Target group	Medium	Intention	Effect
Short message, only headlines	All citizens of the country	National television or radio	Informing the nation that something special is going on, rousing curiosity	Draws attention of the general public and creates awareness
Headlines and some details	Readers of newspapers	National press	Giving more information about the project, rousing attention of professionals	Draws the attention of the more interested public towards the project
Headlines and some details, personal appearance of local politician	Inhabitants of the local government	Local press	Giving information, showing the work of the politician	Citizens know about the project, know which politician is behind it
Possibility of interaction and discussion, message can be tailored to the people present	Groups invited to the meeting	Meetings with groups like business people, organisations of citizens, quarter groups	To give more information, to hear opinions, to let citizens participate	Provides information about how to improve the one stop desk, strongly improves public support
Headlines, pictures, brief information, but in a nice form	General public, but also special persons (by selective distribution)	Brochures about the one stop desk	Gives information, shows the work of the politician, rouses attention of other authorities and professionals	Draws the attention of the more interested public towards the project
Services delivered through the one stop desk	Clients of the one stop desk	Special pages in local newspaper	Informing the public about where to go for services	Enlarges the use of the one stop desk
Present situation of the project, vision on the possible results	Employees of the local government organisation	Internal newsletters	Keeping the organisation informed and enthusiastic	Organisation keeps on co-operating
Actual situation and consequences for the department	Employees of departments or whole organisation	Regular meetings with staff	Keeping the organisation informed and enthusiastic, trying to diagnose resistance	Organisation does not delay the work but keeps co-operating

7 Risk analysis

During the process of establishing a one stop desk risks might threaten the process. Some of them are small or unlikely, others are serious and may stall the project. It is advisable to anticipate all risks and establish measures to counter them. The table below shows a number of common risks, their effects, and measures to counter them.

Risk	Effect	Measure
Politicians lose interest	Support diminishes and the budget is under threat	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Assure a formal approval for establishment of the one stop desk
Politicians are not re-elected and their successors are not in favour of the project	The project comes to a stand still	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Assure a formal approval for establishment of the one stop desk Regenerate political support (step 1)
Resistance of employees who have to work in the new situation	The project slows down or is even sabotaged	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Regenerate organisational support (step 1)
Contractors deliver bad or late work or go bankrupt	The work stops or is seriously delayed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Follow professional procurement procedures Hire an inspector to control the work once it started
Lack of budget	A simpler /less functioning one stop desk	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Proper financial plan delivered as part of the decision making moment Look for external resources (grants, subsidies)
Lack of implementation time	Poorly functioning one stop desk; unsatisfied staff and citizens	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Make a proper planning and monitor the implementation phases

Step 3

Reorganising the municipal organisation

Establishing a one stop desk means a reorganisation of the local government organisation. The desk itself should be established as a new department or unit of the organisation. To create this new organisation, at first services and products should be selected to be delivered by the one stop desk. Secondly, the process of delivering these services should be analysed. Thirdly, front and back offices should be created and embedded in the organisation. As a final step, continuous feedback from citizens should be encouraged for a well-functioning one stop desk.

1 Selection of services and products

In the ideal situation the one stop desk should deliver all products and services for its citizens. At the start it is advised to select a small number only of products and services and add to these over time as needed. To select the most appropriate product or service at start a long list of all local government products and services should be made. Heads of departments should be asked, which of their products and services can be transferred to the one stop desk. The most appropriate products and services are selected from this long list, for transfer to the one stop desk.

Moravská Třebová started its one stop desk in 2003 with 5 products: issuing identification cards and passports, evidence of residency, verification of documents, and payment of local taxes and fees. By the end of 2009, 24 products and services were available through the one stop desk run by 5 front office staff. (www.moravskatrebova.cz)

2 Process analysis

When the appropriate products and services are selected a process analysis should be made for each of those products and services. This process analysis provides information on the process of how a product or service is developed and delivered. The expert on process analysis can do this by getting answers to the following questions:

- What is the product/service we are talking about? Is it a document, like a driver's license, or is it an advice? Is it a standard product/service or are there many variations?
- Are there national regulations for delivering this products/service? This might reduce the freedom for the local government to change the process.
- How do citizens know they need this product/service? Does the local government inform citizens for instance when it is time for a new driver's license?
- How is the process delivery for that product/service currently organised?
- What is the number of services/products delivered per year?
- What is the time needed for each step? The time needed for all steps together is the total time needed to deliver this service per unit.

Example of a process analysis for a passport:

- 1 A citizen enters the local government building.
- 2 The civil servant at the one stop desk asks them what they want.
- 3 The civil servant checks whether the citizen has the necessary documents, like old passport and photo.
- 4 The civil servant refers the citizen to a room where he/she will be helped.
- 5 The citizen waits until it is their turn.
- 6 A civil servant helps the citizen by filling out the necessary documents. for purchasing a new passport.
- 7 The civil servant directs the citizen to another room to pay for the new passport.
- 8 The citizen waits until it is their turn.
- 9 A civil servant organises the payment for the new passport.
- 10 The citizen leaves the local government building.

If a local government issues 10,000 passports per year. The delivery of each passport takes 30 minutes. Issuing 10,000 passports takes 300,000 minutes, or 5,000 man hours per year.

To be able to establish how many civil servants are needed for delivering a passport you calculate the number of productive working hours of a civil servant. This depends on many factors, like the number of working hours in your country, the average sickness rate, holidays, etcetera. The productive time for a civil servant can be calculated as follows (in hours):

Gross working time (36 hours a week, 52 weeks)	1,872
Holidays and vacations (23 days, 8 hours a day)	84 -/-
Average rate of illness 5%	94 -/-
Training and courses	80 -/-
Communication, evaluation talks	100 -/-
 Total productive time	 1,414
 Needed for issuing 10.000 passports per year	 5,000
 Number of employees needed for issuing passports approximately	 3,5

In Moravská Třebová these analyses resulted in sheets per product, as delivered by the one stop desk. In these sheets the division between front office (FO) and back office (BO) is indicated. Below the product sheet for issuing an ID card is given (short version):

Name of department: Internal Affairs Department

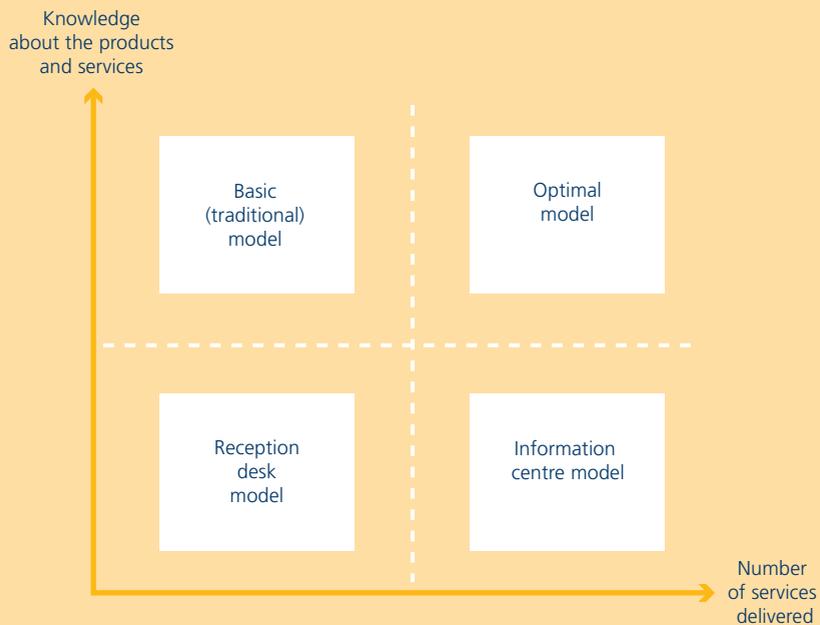
Name of product: ID card

No	FO, BO	Name of operation, description	Time
1	FO	Receiving of request	2 min
2	FO	Checking the data	3 min
3	BO	Carrying out the request and sending	3 min
4	BO	Feeding the register with the data	3 min
5	FO	Issue of an ID card	2 min
		Total FO	7 min
		Total BO	6 min
		Total FO+BO	13 min

3 Front office and back office

For proper delivery of the local government products and services by the one stop desk, a front and a back office should be established. The front office is the physical one stop desk with civil servants dealing directly with the citizen. Since no single civil servant has all the knowledge about all the local government products and services, he or she is dependent on other civil servants. The civil servants who provide expert knowledge and input to deliver the service are the back office. This 'back office' consists more or less of all other civil servants in the local government. The front office is responsible for good contact with citizens and with the experts in the back office - the intermediary between citizens and experts.

The question remains however how detailed the knowledge of the front office staff should be of each product and service. In the most sophisticated front offices all knowledge is present and a citizen does not need to be redirected to another office or desk. But this means more work for the front office staff which would mean more staff is needed. Furthermore, the civil servants in the most sophisticated front office need to be more knowledgeable about the services than in a simpler construction. They need to be better qualified, which means higher costs. The different types of front offices can be illustrated graphically.



The four types can be characterised as follows:

Reception desk model

This model can hardly be seen as a one stop desk. It functions more or less as a reception desk with minimal knowledge and delivery of the products and services. In this model citizens are mainly directed to departments (back office) to receive the requested product or service.

Information centre model

This one stop desk provides information to citizens about almost all the municipal products and services. The front office staff is however strongly depending on the knowledge of the back office for the actual delivery of the products and services.

Basic (traditional) model

In this model the one stop desk delivers a limited number of services and products. The front office staff is qualified to deliver these products and services themselves. The basic model is often used in municipalities that recently started a one stop desk.

Optimal model

The front office staff of a one stop desk in the optimal model have knowledge about nearly every municipal service and product; and they can deliver it to the citizen without much support from the back office.

The main difference between each model is the profile of the front office staff. In the reception desk model the civil servant present need not be highly qualified. Depending on the kind of one stop desk planned this profile changes. So proper education and training of the civil servant working at the one stop desk is relevant. Step 4 deals with this in more detail.

4 Embedding the one stop desk in the organisation

A one stop desk should be structured as a new department, unit or section within the local government organisation, with its own head and staff. Because the one stop desk works with products from all departments, it is not logical to make it part of an existing department. Quite often the one stop desk is placed directly under the top civil servant or under the politician responsible for internal affairs. The one stop desk should be 'independent', so that no services have an unfair advantage.

In Moravská Třebová the one stop desk is embedded in the local government organisation as section of the department of Internal Affairs. The head of the section is subordinate to the head of the department of Internal Affairs. This model was chosen at the beginning in 2003 when the one stop desk was delivering 5 products and services. Anno 2009 the new one stop desk delivers 24 products and services with transfer of new competences from the national to the local level, and a new model is being reconsidered. In this model the one stop desk might become a separate department subordinate directly to the city manager.

5 Organising feedback

To assure that the one stop desk serves its first and foremost purpose, the needs of the citizens, continuous feedback is necessary. Feedback from citizens is often (considered as) a complaint. This should not be seen as such, but as a form of free advice. From complaints (feedback) staff can learn how to improve services, products, procedures, and behaviour. A professional organisation makes it easy for citizens to give feedback on its services. There are several ways to organise feedback:

- Ask citizens to fill in a short questionnaire.
- Interview citizens about their experiences.
- Offer citizens an official procedure for complaints.
- Promise citizens their complaints will be dealt with professionally.
- Organise meetings where people can formulate their ideas about the one stop desk.

To organise feedback in a brave, easy and entertaining manner, Romny placed three vases on a table at the one stop desk. In the first vase there are orange balls, in the second vase white balls. The third vase is empty. Citizens give their opinion on the service received by putting either an orange (positive) or a white (negative) ball in the empty vase. The dominant colour in the third vase visually describes the general opinion of the citizens. The more orange balls, the better.

Step 4

Creating a qualified staff

A vital factor for a well-functioning one stop desk is its staff. They deal directly with the requests of citizens and have a major influence on the citizen leaving satisfied or not. One has to be sure qualified staff are running the one stop desk. Be clear what is meant by qualified staff. Job descriptions allow matching good people with the task at hand. Staff not yet qualified can and should be trained.

1 Job description

A job description is a critical resource. A good job description starts with the description of the department responsible for the one stop desk itself. It consists of the following:

- Name of the department (one stop desk).
- Position of the department in the local government organisation (under direct responsibility of the city manager).
- Goal of the department (to deliver services to the citizens in an efficient, client friendly manner).
- Tasks of the department (the result of the process analyses per product).
- Number of functions (derived from the process analyses).

The tasks of the one stop desk are derived from the process analyses. The result is a number of miscellaneous tasks: Difficult, easy, time consuming, complex, etcetera. From this number of tasks coherent groups have to be formed. Tasks that require the same level of education, capabilities, experience, etcetera can be combined into one function. The tasks should also offer variation for the employee who is going to have this job. A job description consists of:

- Job title.
- Function.
- Salary indication.
- Responsibilities (ranked from high to low time consuming).
- Primary tasks.
- Competences (capabilities needed for this function).
- Experience and education.

The job descriptions are a good starting point for the selection of staff. They provide the information for advertisements and can also be used as a checklist to evaluate candidates. If a good candidate does not score on all criteria on the check list, the job description helps to establish what further training is necessary.

Once an employee has started to work in his job regular evaluation talks are useful between the employee and manager about how work is going on, whether the goals are being reached, and how the tasks are fulfilled. The job descriptions can be the starting point for such talks. Effective evaluation talks should:

- Be held regularly (every year or half year) in a quiet location.
- Be reciprocal: the employee gives feedback on the way the manager does his work. (It should be noted that this working style is common in the Netherlands and other Western countries but is not common practice or valued everywhere else).
- Be well prepared: both manager and employee can set the agenda.
- Be based on the job description.
- Discuss the future personal development of the employee (education, training).
- Draw specific and concrete conclusions for evaluation in the next talk.

The following document is used as a job description for a front office member of staff of the one stop desk in Moravská Třebová.

Job title	Officer of the department of the Internal Affairs
Organisation unit	Department of Internal Affairs
Salary	Wage class nr. 8
Reports to	Head of Department of Inner Affairs
Function	Collecting and issuing official copies, abstracts and verifications for citizens, state bodies and others
Responsibilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Executing state administration tasks such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Evidence of residence > ID cards and Passports > Collection of administrative fees > Document and signature verification • Executing self-government tasks such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Collection of local fees (eg. waste) > Issuing permits (eg. fishing) > Issuing of requested forms • Other tasks: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Delivering of authorised conversion of documents for the state authorities and for others > Electronic signing of documents
Primary tasks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Issuing documents • Assistance to clients with filling in forms • Receiving, processing and documenting of filled in forms. • Checking the data in the forms • Electronically processing the data • Informing the clients about the delivery of requested product (e.g. passport) • Providing information about the tasks, products and services of the municipality to the citizens

Competences	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Team worker • Friendly and welcome attitude to clients • Stress resistant • Loyal
Experience and education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Czech citizenship • Fluent in Czech (both spoken and written) • Driving licence • At least secondary education • Computer literate • State competence exams in public administration

2 Training staff

Job descriptions show what employees need to be able to do to perform their tasks well, and the resulting education, capabilities, and competences required. Because the one stop desk is the local government office that citizens will visit most frequently, staff members should be well qualified, professional and have the right positive, people-friendly attitude.

Civil servants selected to work for a one stop desk must be properly equipped for their task and particularly in two topics: Client-friendliness and knowledge of products and services.

Client-friendliness

Once the one stop desk has been fully established most contacts between the citizens and the local government will take place here. A client-friendly civil servant:

- Is able to think of himself as a citizen.
- Is proactive and does his utmost to serve his client.
- Knows about the products and services.
- Understands the needs of the citizens and helps to find solutions for them.
- Is not bureaucratic finding reasons not to help a citizen, or sending them elsewhere.
- Behaves pleasantly but also knows how to say 'no' without being rude.

Knowledge of products and services

Staff of the one stop desk must have basic knowledge of the products and services they deliver and this depends on the responsibilities of the one stop desk. They have to decide whether a request should be passed on to the back office or not. This requires knowledge of the procedures per product. Services processed by the back office requires the staff of the one stop desk to have sufficient knowledge to be able to explain the processes used and decisions made by the back office.

There are several ways to provide training, basically bought in professional training or training by in-house experts, and during or out of working hours. Group training is a cost-effective way of training many staff simultaneously. Both general knowledge on subjects such as client friendliness, and subjects that are location-specific are necessary. Training should always be adapted to the local situation. Most knowledge is already present in the organisation such as the content of products and services. The process analysis as part of step 3 is an important source here. Product sheets with a description of each product or service are important instruments for keeping knowledge available at the one stop desk.

Training staff is not cheap but must be considered an investment in human capital. Costs should be included in the budget.

Step 5

Building the one stop desk

1 Finding the right location

One of the last steps in the creation of a one stop desk is actually building it. A one stop desk is a place for people. Staff competence, location, design, hardware/software available, and all other aspects must sustain the idea and reality of professional service delivery to the citizen. To find the right location the following information is needed:

- The number of products and services to be delivered. Future growth must be taken into account. If the desk proves popular it should have the chance to grow.
- The number of civil servants that have to work there. This is the result of the process analysis in step 3.2.
- The relationship between front office and back office. A large distance between them is costly: People and files lose time in travelling. Computer networks solve much of this but not everything.

The location is also important from a psychological viewpoint. The one stop desk will become the most frequent place for citizens to meet their local government. So it will represent, and be the public face, of local government. The location of the one stop desk should ideally be in the town hall or nearby.

In Romny the search for a location started with an empty office next to a dentist's practice on one of the main roads not far from the town hall. It was abandoned as it did not offer space for future enlargement, did not have the proper status and the distance from the town hall although not large would have caused much walking for civil servants. Romny thus chose to refurbish a part of the ground floor of the town hall itself, with the receptionist being the first person a visitor met when entering, and the way to the office was clearly indicated.

2 Designing the one stop desk

With its location selected, the physical desk must be designed and built. This should clearly be according to the precepts of citizen-friendliness and convenience.

- Outside the building the entrance to the one stop desk should be clearly signposted.
- Handicapped people should have easy access.
- It must be clear where the visitor has to go.
- The one stop desk might consist of different counters which also must be clearly indicated. It all must be made as simple and clear as possible.
- As waiting will sometimes be inevitable there should be a comfortable place to wait. From the waiting room visitors must be able to see and hear when it is their turn to go to the right counter.
- Waiting is boring. Interesting reading with up to date magazines, animated TV screens, and a well equipped children's corner will all be valued highly.
- The design should be open and transparent. Glass helps.
- Not all discussions are pleasant at the one stop desk, not every citizen is polite. Design should protect the civil servant and other citizens from aggressive customers. Glass between citizen and civil servant should be strong and there should not be too many loose objects people can throw.
- Privacy is also important. Between the counters some physical separation is advised. Arrange separate rooms for private matters.
- Some services need special furniture, such as helping citizens write letters. The common layout of a counter will not work well here.
- Much information can be displayed on the walls. But not too much, and not in small letters; it will probably not be read. Bright posters are often successful.

How a one stop desk looks enhances a professional image. Also the case for the way civil servants dress. In Vlaardingen civil servants at the one stop desk are dressed uniformly. It was decided against name badges to sustain the idea that the civil servant represents the local government and that the name of the civil servant is not important for this. In Romny there are no uniforms but every civil servant at on the one stop desk wears some element in the city's colour, green, a tie or shirt or something similar.

3 ICT hardware and software

Computers are almost inevitable for proper service delivery. These should be connected to the most common systems in the local government, such as the population register, tax records, geographic information for planning permissions, etcetera. Computers also make communication between front and back office easier. ICT systems register clients for the one stop desk, direct them to the right counter and record which services they need. This latter function is important as it provides information for evaluation of the one stop desk. Management will learn which services are more in demand than others. More advanced systems even measure average waiting time and service delivery time. This can be compared with the results of the process analyses.

For many services citizens must pay. Depending on the financial systems of a country PIN-systems can be very client-friendly. Of course cash payments are also possible, but for cash payments special measures must be taken, to prevent fraud.

Placing computers on the one stop desk for citizens without proper guidance and software should be avoided. It tends to create inefficiency and frustration.

Step 6

Assuring sustainability

The establishment of a one stop desk typically results in better service delivery. However there is always a chance that old routines return and the improved service delivery deteriorates. The following instruments are helpful to counter this:

- **Develop a long term vision:** Such a vision should be there at the beginning of the process (step 1) but needs regular updating. This vision should contain the following aspects:
 - > *Why* a one stop desk? (improved service delivery, improved relationship between local government and its citizens, need for client friendliness, efficiency and effectiveness etcetera).
 - > *How* is it valued so far? (This can be derived from the process of creating the one stop desk, feedback from citizens and experience in daily routine).
 - > *What* do we want to achieve as final result? (all municipal products available through the one stop desk; 80 percent of citizens are content with municipal service delivery (survey)).
- **Generate media attention:** For instance with regular press releases. Ensure that the one stop desk is mentioned positively in the media to sustain support of politicians, citizens and the organization.
- **Continue process analysis:** After the one stop desk is established and the first products and services are delivered, it is important to add new products and services. If this follow-up takes too long the idea that the old situation was still the most successful may return.
- **Continue training:** The capacity of the staff working for the one stop desk should be maintained through regular trainings on knowledge of products and services, client- friendliness, computer skills etc. The increased knowledge and capacity of staff should go hand in hand with the further development of the one stop desk.
- **Assure funding:** Adequate funding for maintenance of the one stop desk should be assured. Useful instruments include the long term budget plan and support of politicians.
- **Proper complaint handling:** Support from citizens for the one stop desk may diminish if complaints, remarks and advice from the public are not properly dealt with.

The one stop desk in Moravská Třebová generated much attention. It was officially opened by the mayors of Vlaardingen and Moravská Třebová and attended by a representative of the Dutch embassy. Since its opening many Czech local governments have visited Moravská Třebová to learn about the one stop desk. As crowning achievement in 2005 the one stop desk was awarded the 'Innovation of the year 2005 in local government' by the Czech Ministry of the Interior.

Summary

A one stop desk is an office where citizens can go to obtain or ask for local government products and services. The basic principle of the one stop desk is that a citizen can obtain the desired product or service, ideally, with one visit. The philosophy behind this principle is that a local government should put the needs and desires of the citizens first and build the organisation and processes around this philosophy.

This toolkit describes the process of establishing a one stop desk using the step-by-step approach developed by VNG International, based on their experience in numerous projects. The six steps needed for establishing a one stop desk contain useful practical examples from some of these projects as well as hands on tools and documents to make that step.

Step 1 explains how to generate support from all the relevant stakeholders like politicians, staff, and citizens to start the process of establishing a one stop desk. Continuous support of these stakeholders is essential throughout the whole process.

Step 2 explains the creation of the project organisation responsible for the implementation and the project plan including objective, results, activities, budget, communication plan, and risk analysis.

Step 3 focuses on the organisational aspects of establishing a one stop desk, mentioning the selection of products and services, their process analysis, the creation of a front and back office, and the embedding of the one stop desk in the local government organisation.

Step 4 explains the selection of the people who will be working for the one stop desk. What are the job descriptions?; Who are the people?; and What trainings are necessary?

Step 5 elaborates on the physical establishment of the one stop desk. What is the proper location?; How should it be furnished?; and What ICT hard and software is useful?

Step 6 is the final step in the process. It explains how sustainability can be assured.

VNG International supports decentralisation processes and facilitates decentralised cooperation. The organisation strengthens local governments, their associations, training institutes and decentralisation task forces both in developing countries and in countries in transition. In addition, our Service Bureau Europe assists municipalities from the Netherlands and other EU countries in accessing European subsidies and in creating knowledge networks.

Our home office employs some 50 staff and there are project offices in various countries. VNG International works with a large group of local government experts with broad international experience. In close cooperation with the national associations of municipalities in these countries four daughter companies have been established in the Czech Republic, South Africa, Ukraine and Mexico.

VNG International

Committed to strengthening democratic local government worldwide



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