Final Performance Report
to the National Spatial Data Infrastructure Cooperative Agreement Program
Strategic Planning for the Open Accessible Space Information System (OASIS)
of New York City
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Collaborating Organizations
The Open Accessible Space Information System (OASIS) is guided by a steering committee of almost 60 organizations, the most active of which are listed at www.oasisnyc.net/resources/about_oasis/participants.asp. The planning sub-committee involved directly in the strategic planning effort supported by this grant included (listed alphabetically by last name):
- Bob Alpern (individual)
- Matthew Arnn (USDA Forest Service, Northeastern Area)
- Jack Eichenbaum (Coordinator, GIS and Mapping Operations/GISMO New York City)
- Tony Emmerich (New York State Department of Environmental Conservation)
- Paula Hewitt (Open Road of New York)
- Dave LaShell (ESRI / New York City)
- Lenny Librizzi (Council on the Environment of New York City)
- Maura Lout (New Yorkers for Parks)
- Steven Romalewski (Center for Urban Research)
- Bill Shore (Nature Network)
- Jane Sokolow (OASIS consultant / Metro Forest Council)
- Christina Spielman (Community Mapping Assistance Project)
- Erika Svendsen (USDA Forest Service / Living Memorials Project)

Project Narrative: background
OASIS is an interactive GIS website for green infrastructure in the New York metropolitan region (www.oasisnyc.net). Supported primarily with public funds, it helps government agencies, nonprofits, community activists, local businesses, academic institutions, and others develop a better understanding of their environment with interactive maps of open spaces, property information, transportation networks, and more. Use of the OASIS website is free to the tens of thousands who have accessed it – a fact that is critical to its success.

But to describe OASIS only as a website scarcely captures what makes it special. More importantly it is a consortium of public and private organizations and individuals that have seen the power of collective effort. The group has pooled resources to create an on-line repository and delivery vehicle for spatial data while coming together as a forum for communication and information sharing.

Though the project emphasizes open space-related information, it encompasses a wider range of data and issues. The mission of OASIS is to "develop an accessible information system that helps enhance the stewardship of open space so these areas are linked, diverse and sustainable for the benefit of all people, organisms, and ecosystems in and around New York City." From its inception, however, a key goal of the project has also been to emphasize the nexus between a city's open spaces and its vacant land, housing, zoning, transportation, educational facilities, and a host of other land use planning and community development issues.

Although the project has succeeded in several ways, some of the attributes that make OASIS an effective participatory model also raise issues that need to be addressed to ensure long-term sustainability. The project enjoys wide support, yet it is neither a permanent organization nor does it have a permanent home, and funding is year-to-year. The dilemma faced by OASIS is how to preserve its vitality while developing a sustainable future. The NSDI grant has helped to overcome this challenge.

Project Goals and Objectives
The project proposal sought funding support from NSDI to address the following goals and objectives:
1) *GOAL: Support the ongoing work of the OASIS strategic planning committee*
   - Objective(s):
        i. hire a part-time coordinator for OASIS to oversee these planning efforts.
2) *GOAL: Develop a plan for sustainability*
   - Objective(s):
        i. hire a consultant to work with OASIS to do the research for a sustainability plan;
        ii. develop a 5-year plan to be distributed to funders, in-kind supporters, partner organizations, agencies, and others who can assist in its implementation;
        iii. have commitments, if not actual funding support, to meet OASIS's resource needs for the period covered by the plan; and
        iv. begin the plan's implementation.
3) *GOAL: Improve metadata standards on OASIS*
   - Objective(s):
        i. obtain training in metadata standards;
        ii. educate data providers to OASIS about the importance of metadata standards, request FGDC compliant metadata from all data providers, and provide access to this metadata on the OASIS website; and
        iii. connect formally with GeoSpatial One Stop and The National Map.

Project Activities
The grant successfully leveraged the accomplishment of almost all of these aims, as follows:

1) *Support the ongoing work of the OASIS strategic planning committee*

OASIS was able to hire Jane E. S. Sokolow, of the Metro Forest Council, to coordinate the

development of a strategic plan for OASIS, as well as outreach and fundraising activities. Jane has a wide-ranging background as an environmental consultant with experience in organizational development and fund raising, creating and writing interpretive materials and curricula for exhibitions and education programs, and interpretive science writing. She was hired initially in 2004 and has been consulting with OASIS since then.

Jane has been instrumental in overseeing the strategic planning effort, identifying a consultant to guide OASIS through a successful planning process (described in more detail below), and facilitating meetings with the planning committee and others.

2) Develop a plan for sustainability

The OASIS steering committee decided at the outset that access to the website was to be free, and participation in the project would not require a fee. This was possible because the Forest Service had committed to funding the project for its first few years, and wanted the project to be as inclusive as possible and for the website to have the broadest usage. The Forest Service's budget for projects like OASIS is being reduced, however, and OASIS cannot rely on any single source of funding.

Similarly, steering committee members did not need to develop a formal organizational structure due to the Forest Service's overall coordination and leadership for OASIS. For example, issues about the OASIS website functionality, what data sets to include or omit, the diversity and inclusiveness of the steering committee, and how to publicize the project often had been made on an ad hoc basis (sometimes by the committee, sometimes by individual organizations). Data sets had been chosen based primarily on availability and ease of integration. Organizational structure was an open question. Funding strategies were reactive, not proactive.

These dual issues prompted the steering committee to begin a formal planning process for OASIS's future. We held a series of internal strategic planning meetings early in 2004, but soon realized that professional expertise was needed. In addition to support from NSDI, the coalition raised funds in 2004 and 2005 from the Carriage House Foundation, USDA Forest Service, Fund for the City of New York, Jessie Smith Noyes Foundation, Mertz Gilmore Foundation, New York City Environmental Fund, and the Sloan Foundation in order to cover the expenses of the planning effort, including the hiring of Wolf, Keens, and Co. in early 2005. Guided by Wolf Keens, the planning process consisted of:
- compiling and reviewing documents and materials about the project filling four large binders (also helping us to document the history of OASIS);
- holding focus group meetings and planning sessions with different members of the OASIS steering committee and sub-committees;
- interviewing more than 25 individuals including representatives of partnering organizations, funders, and users;
- surveying website users;
- comparing OASIS with other similar projects nationwide; and
- receiving a final report from Wolf Keens that included specific recommendations regarding outreach to untapped constituencies, enhanced educational efforts using the OASIS model, a decision-making structure, and sustainable funding mechanisms.

The planning process also became linked to the question of organizational host for OASIS. To paraphrase Wolf Keens final report:

> … it became clear that the first priority for the planning process was to solve the problem of financial and organizational viability, seeking a structure that would provide a solid base. Accordingly, the group spent several months developing criteria for solving the structural challenges and over time effected a major organizational transition to what is now a new arrangement with the Graduate Center of the City University of New York (CUNY).
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> The genesis of this new arrangement was based on a series of exploratory conversations with a number of potential hosts. The idea of a relationship with the Center for Urban Research at the CUNY Graduate Center was first discussed in April 2005. Over time and with further conversation, it became clear that this option could prove most advantageous for OASIS. In January 2006, Steven Romalewski was officially hired as a staff person of the Center for Urban Research, leaving the Community Mapping Assistance Project (CMAP) as a project solely within OASIS's former host, the New York Public Interest Research Group. With the support of the Forest Service, the OASIS website and related materials, skills, and data sets also transitioned to the Center. The web site will now be hosted by the Center, other CMAP staff who had developed the OASIS website will also move to the Center, and outside consulting arrangements will continue for OASIS through the Center.
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> It is important to note that while the move did sever the OASIS relationship with NYPIRG and CMAP, the intellectual property, staff, and knowledge base that were identified as essential to any change in organizational structure remain intact and part of OASIS, now through the CUNY Graduate Center. Equally important, the Center for Urban Research respects the independence in decision-making, fund raising, and outreach/educational activities undertaken to date by the OASIS Steering Committee participants. The Center supports maintaining this independent approach until the Steering Committee takes steps to modify it.

After OASIS successfully transitioned to CUNY, the steering committee met in May 2006 to review Wolf Keens's final report and decide on a course of action. Subsequent meetings have refined the plan especially as it relates to sustainable funding mechanisms. Although these events occurred outside the time period of the NSDI grant, the success of our planning process was integrally linked to early support by NSDI. The attached materials document the results of our efforts:
- a summary of our strategic planning milestones;
- Wolf Keens reports;
- a description of OASIS's governance structure and a related diagram outlining opportunities for participation;
- criteria for developing content for the OASIS website;
- a summary of feedback from website users; and
- an overview of next steps regarding sustainable funding.

During the course of the strategic planning process, the regional nature of the OASIS collaborative and website was noted as an important strength. For example, the US Environmental Protection Agency's "Harbor Estuary Program" realized that collaborating with OASIS would be more efficient and timely than developing its own website showing the locations of, and information about, priority acquisition and restoration sites for the region's habitat areas. Each of the more than 200 priority sites are now mapped and accessible through OASIS (http://www.oasisnyc.net/hep/hepmapsearch.asp).

Also, the Forest Service's "Living Memorials Initiative" supports the creation and maintenance of lasting, living memorials that invoke the resonating power of trees to bring people together in the aftermath of 9/11. The Living Memorials project team works closely with the OASIS collaborative, relies on maps provided through OASIS to determine best areas for tree planting, and uses the OASIS website to display the locations and information about memorial in the New York region

In order to help promote the value of these partnerships and also to make OASIS's governance transparent and invite community participation, one result of the planning process was the creation of an online wiki at http://oasisnyc.gc.cuny.edu. It provides an easily accessible view of the decision-making process for OASIS and the partnerships that have resulted.

3) Improve metadata standards on OASIS
This goal has not been fully met, although we have taken steps to make it easier for website users to understand the source(s), vintage, appropriate uses, and related information about data sets that make up the OASIS website.

For example, we have created summary pages for most of the data layers on OASIS that provide an overview plus contact information for the data sets. These pages are linked directly to the layer item on the OASIS website, such as:

This information is also accessible from a single metadata web page as part of OASIS, as follows:

As we continue to enhance OASIS – especially with the inclusion of community-generated data – we will continue to improve metadata and the ability of website users to access this information.

Next steps
The main area for OASIS's planning activities is to act on the sustainable funding recommendations offered by Wolf Keens. We have begun to do that by prioritizing the most likely sources of ongoing support and reviewing that with the steering committee. In particular, we will seek support from several areas such as website sponsorships, public sector budget line items (especially from local governments, given the large number of agency staff that rely on the OASIS website), grant support for partnership projects, and research-oriented projects.