Talking Points for the Kick-Off Ceremony of the MRES Project of Calamba City

1. As I look at technology today, I cannot help but feel lucky that I was born at the day and age when I have witnessed its birth, growth and how it has changed and continues to change the way we live, most especially how we communicate with each other. Those were the days when computers are practically inaccessible to just anyone, telephones are virtually scarce, and information is limited to only those who read newspapers, watch TV and listen to radio, which were very few then.

2. Today, many households own computers; Internet cafes proliferate in almost all localities; more than 80 million Filipinos own SIM Cards; and information can now be easily accessed by anyone through cellphones, traditional media and the Internet. The Philippines has become the texting capital of the world with around 2 billion text messages sent per day. We now belong to the top three nations of the world in social networking, reading and writing blogs, and photo and video sharing.

3. Despite the wide use of technology in the country today, the government has not kept pace in adopting technology to make it an integral part of its functional operations. I'm not saying though that government has been remiss in taking advantage of technological developments. For a time, Electronic Government or E-Government has been touted to be the answer to many government inefficiencies and even corruption.

4. In fact, many national government agencies have implemented ICT programs. Some 300 LGUs, out of the more than 1,600 provinces, cities, and municipalities, have implemented or are still implementing ICT projects. But these national agencies and LGUs have yet to demonstrate, or even prove, to the public that such programs have produced positive results notwithstanding the huge investments made on them. This has generated public criticisms, if not distrust, over E-Government Projects. Proof of this is the public outcry generated during the Senate investigation of the ZTE Project of the Arroyo administration. Consequently, many national agencies and LGUs have become reluctant, or even afraid, to implement their own E-Government Projects.

5. I think the City Government of Calamba is no exception to this situation. That is why I only have admiration and respect for the Honorable Mayor of Calamba City, Jun Chipeco, in taking a bold but calculated step towards E-Government. He did it despite the vile criticisms from his political opponents and even doubts from his allies. As your chosen technology

partner, I can only be grateful to your decisiveness and resolve to implement this project despite the political odds you're facing now. But this much I can promise you: Amellar will make full use of its talents and resources to ensure the success of our E-Government Project.

6. As you already know, talents and resources are not enough to guarantee success. Let me then take this opportunity to outline before you – the stakeholders of this Project – the strategy that Amellar has been using, and have polished over time, to ensure our collective success. This E-Government strategy is simple and measurable. It is simple because it only aims to achieve four (4) objectives and these are efficiency, effectiveness, accountability, and transparency. As I've said a while ago, the strategy is measurable because we will measure our performance in terms of achieving these goals.

7. First, we will achieve efficiency if we are able to provide faster services to our citizens and make their transaction with the city government as convenient and pleasant as possible. We also recommend that you incorporate customer service when you interact with citizens. Customer service is now recognized as one of the hallmarks of high-performing governments all over the world. As part of your agenda to promote good governance and build citizen-centric services in the City Government, we will work together to enable and empower city officials and frontline employees in providing excellent customer service to Calamba's taxpaying public.

8. As the second measure, effectiveness will be gauged in terms of increments in your revenues resulting from this Project. This measure is critical in the sense that this is the only way we can justify the relatively huge investments you've made on this Project. Besides, this is one way that we can debunk critics and the doubting Thomases of the Project. We will also measure effectiveness in terms of streamlining your internal processes as a result of automation. We will work together to eliminate redundant and unnecessary steps in your day-to-day operations.

9. The third measure, accountability, is essential for the long-term sustainability of E-Government. The project will make every revenue transaction accountable. Amellar systems are replete with routines that ensure fairness and equity. Transactions will be automated and human discretion, especially on matters of assessments and payments of taxes, will be kept to a minimum. Users will have clearly defined levels of access to the systems. Everyone will be made accountable to every record

accessed, transacted and even the documents viewed, edited or printed. Aside from this, all transactions will be captured in the centralized database so audit trails will be easier and faster. These information will also be helpful for the city management to incent worthy public servants who are hardworking since their performance can be handily measured as to the number of transactions handled daily, taxpayers served, and revenues assessed and collected.

10. Lastly, transparency can be achieved in terms of maintaining the integrity of your records – manual or digital. This starts with the database construction, which includes scanning of manual records, encoding, cleansing and reconciliation. During the database construction, Amellar will take the lead on this. Based on our experience working with more than 50 LGUs, however, around 20%-40% of your manual records may turn out to be deficient and need to be corrected over time. But database integrity does not end there. The project stakeholders must take full ownership of the digital records after the database construction. Users who follow procedures and data conventions will then nourish your digital records. They have to feed the database with diligent and straightforward transactions.

11. If these practices are sustained, the city assessor, treasurer, BPTFO chief, and other revenue officers will be able to generate faster and reliable information to help them decide and enforce collection efforts and remedies and enhance financial transactions. For decision makers, you will be able to generate management and statistical reports through data mining to discover and interpret patterns and trends in information to solve current problems or plan future actions.

12. Again, I would like to thank Mayor Chipeco, your department heads and staff, especially the newly formed Project Management Board, for trusting Amellar to be your partner in E-Government. In behalf of my co-workers in Amellar, let me reiterate our commitment to be your worthy E-Government partner and, ultimately, to the success of our E-Government Project. Thank you very much for your indulgence.