

2008 Innovations Awards Program APPLICATION

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ID # (assigned by CSG): 08-E-37VT

Please provide the following information, adding space as necessary:

State: Vermont
Assign Program Category (applicant): Courts

1. **Program Name:** Court Pay
2. **Administering Agency:** Vermont Judiciary
3. **Contact Person (Name and Title):** J. Casey Faiman,
General Manager, Vermont Information Consortium
4. **Address:** 535 Stone Cutters Way 3rd Floor Suite 2
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8. **Web site Address:** www.vermont.gov or <https://secure.vermont.gov/courts/payments/>

9. Please provide a two-sentence description of the program.

The Vermont Court Pay service is an online service that allows the general public to pay, and court personnel to collect and apply, court fines and traffic violations throughout the state. The service allows the public to pay fines quickly and conveniently with their credit cards at the court or from home, and receive a real-time confirmation of their payment.

10. How long has this program been operational (month and year)? Note: the program must be between 9 months and 5 years old on March 1, 2008 to be considered.

Vermont Court Pay has been operational since February, 2007.

11. Why was the program created? What problem[s] or issue[s] was it designed to address?

The Vermont Judiciary created the Court Pay service out of a need to collect a significant backlog of fines owed to the Judiciary, some of which exceeded twenty years in arrears. In order to better collect these fines, it was decided that an online service utilized by Judiciary staff and the general public would help facilitate the process.

12. Describe the specific activities and operations of the program in chronological order.

Phase One (Judicial Bureau/Civil Penalties) of the service was launched in February, 2007 and focused on the collection efforts of the Judicial Bureau staff exclusively in two court locations. Select court personnel were trained on the system, given usernames and passwords, and collected payment on behalf of citizens who owed the Bureau fines for civil violations such as traffic tickets, municipal, and fish and game violations. Court personnel were able to securely access administrative screens to process reports, access transaction information, and edit users. To allow for convenient, accurate and rapid input of credit card information, card swipe machines were integrated into the system. The service was not available to anyone without a username and password, and was thus closed to the general public.

Phase Two (General Public/Civil Penalties) was opened up to the general public in July, 2007. Accessed via the same URL (but stripped of the login suffix), the welcome page for the public did not require a username and password, and allowed citizens to pay the Judicial Bureau fines for traffic tickets, municipal, and fish and game violations. Users identify themselves with the complaint or ticket number and their name and date of birth.

Phase Three (District Courts/Criminal & Civil Penalties) was launched in September, 2007, and allowed court personnel at 14 District Courts around Vermont to enter payment for criminal violations. Unavailable to the general public, Phase Three was again accessed by a login page, and provided a new link for District Courts on the Welcome Page, as well as new data fields for the case information screen. Card swipe machines were again integrated into the system to allow for convenient input of credit card information.

13. Why is the program a new and creative approach or method?

By creating an online service to collect both civil and criminal penalties owed to the state, and implementing it at the Judicial Bureau, 14 District Courts, and making it available to the general public as an online service as well, the Vermont Judiciary expands their potential target audience substantially and generates more revenue than ever before to reduce their backlog of overdue fines.

14. What were the program's start-up costs? (Provide details about specific purchases for this program, staffing needs and other financial expenditures, as well as existing materials, technology and staff already in place.)

Because the state opted for a self-funded service, with the exception of approximately \$400 in costs for the card swipe machines, the Vermont Judiciary did not pay for the development of the service, nor does it pay for maintenance, support and hosting of the service. The Court Administrator's Office devoted significant time to requirements gathering and participated in training sessions for personnel and staff at the Judicial Bureau and the District Courts. Additionally, the Court Administrator's office developed a field training manual for use by the various court personnel.

15. What are the program's annual operational costs?

Since all aspects of the service, including front-end and backend functionality is maintained and hosted by Vermont Information Consortium (VIC), the state's private sector partner for eGovernment services, there are no annual operational costs to the Vermont Judiciary. Hosting, maintenance, payment processing and support for the application are all funded by transaction fees paid by the citizen user.

16. How is the program funded?

Court Pay is a service of Vermont Information Consortium (VIC), the State of Vermont's private-sector partner and official web portal provider. Court Pay was a service built under the company's self-funded model, and is maintained by ongoing transaction fees. Specifically, each violation paid by a user is subject to a fee of \$4.30, which funds all aspects of the service for the Vermont Judiciary.

17. Did this program require the passage of legislation, executive order or regulations? If YES, please indicate the citation number.

No.

18. What equipment, technology and software are used to operate and administer this program?

The public service which is available for payment of civil penalties requires only a connection to the Internet (and a credit card). The service that was built for the Courts for payment of civil and criminal penalties does not require credit card swipe machines, but they are strongly suggested for the ease and convenience of payment.

19. To the best of your knowledge, did this program originate in your state? If YES, please indicate the innovator's name, present address, telephone number and e-mail address.

Although a similar court payment service may be available in other states, the combination of the public- and private-facing applications, as well as the extensive administrative screens available to the Vermont Judiciary makes this service a one-of-a-kind. The innovator of this particular service is Michael Pratt. His contact information: Michael Pratt, Judicial Hearing Officer, Office of Court Administrator, 109 State Street, Montpelier, VT 05609-0701, Phone: 802-828-3278 E-mail: Michael.Pratt@state.vt.us

20. Are you aware of similar programs in other states? If YES, which ones and how does this program differ?

While there may be other states that offer similar court payment services, we believe this one is unique in offering citizens the ability to pay for both civil and criminal penalties from home or at the Courts.

21. Has the program been fully implemented? If NO, what actions remain to be taken?

Yes, the program has been fully implemented. VIC will continue to work with the Vermont Judiciary as they consider changes to their backend case management system, which may require updates or upgrades to the service.

22. Briefly evaluate (pro and con) the program's effectiveness in addressing the defined problem[s] or issue[s]. Provide tangible examples.

The Vermont Court Pay service has, by most accounts, been a major success. In its first full year of use, the Court Pay service processed over 20,000 transactions and collected nearly \$12 million in overdue fines for the state. Additionally there have been only a handful of user concerns or errors. The only potential con to the service is the fact that not enough people yet know about it.

23. How has the program grown and/or changed since its inception?

By taking a staged approach to the service, the Vermont Judiciary was able to manage a fairly complex implementation process involving several different groups of stakeholders. The deliberate training of Judicial Bureau staff first allowed them to better understand and answer questions from the general public and to be able to offer future training assistance with the staff in District Courts.

24. What limitations or obstacles might other states expect to encounter if they attempt to adopt this program?

The Vermont Court Pay system benefited from a centralized Court Administrator's office which took the lead in driving the creation of this online service, which enabled the Judiciary to go from requirements gathering to launch in just under 3 months – a very aggressive timeline. Other states without the benefit of a strong Administrator's office might experience significant delays in comparison.

Additionally, since project inception VIC has devoted over 800 hours of development and project management time toward the service, which under the self-funded model, cost the Vermont Judiciary nothing. If other states were to employ a time and materials funding model, these cost considerations would be a major factor, and might hinder development.