

2009 Innovations Awards Program APPLICATION

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ID # (assigned by CSG): 09-S-01AL

Please provide the following information, adding space as necessary:

State: Alabama

Assign Program Category (applicant): Health and Human Services

- 1. Program Name:** AlabamaConnect.gov
- 2. Administering Agency:** Alabama Department of Senior Services (ADSS)
- 3. Contact Person:** Ron Tanner, Director of Information Services and Technology
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- 8. Web site Address:** www.AlabamaConnect.gov
- 9. Please provide a two-sentence description of the program.**

Complementing the brick and mortar facilities, AlabamaConnect serves as a virtual service link for the state's Aging and Disability Resource Centers (ADRC) and the 13 Area Agencies on Aging (AAA). AlabamaConnect removes access and distance barriers, transportation barriers, and provides an access to information and referral/assistance to isolated elderly and disabled individuals, and their caregivers.

- 10. How long has this program been operational (month and year)?**

AlabamaConnect became operational January 2007.

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

AlabamaConnect was created to assist older adults, individuals with disabilities and their family members and caregivers locate services they might need, as well as other information that might be of interest and to also

serve as tool for our ADRCs to assist clients in finding services.

AlabamaConnect addressed three main issues:

- accuracy of information provided to consumers
- assisting the public in finding services and information
- Information and Referral system for ADRCs

Prior to AlabamaConnect, 13 Area Agencies on Aging maintained a centralized database of more than 3,200 service providers for Information and Referral and a separate website was used for the public to locate service providers.

When ADRCs were established around the state, software was needed to assist in serving visitors. AlabamaConnect combined these three into a single web application.

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

AlabamaConnect was developed using Agile Software Development Lifecycle and was divided into 3 main parts:

1. Public – the initial website was developed and released for public usage
2. ADRC – visitor tracking and integration with Senior Services database
3. Provider – Provider access and email notifications developed and released

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

In order to achieve our core objectives, we needed to address three audiences: Public, ADRCs and Service Providers. AlabamaConnect's creative approach was to provide a single destination for Consumers, ADRCs and Service Providers to best serve older adults and individuals with disabilities.

One major problem with our previous Information and Referral system was the accuracy of Service Provider information in our I&R database and the amount of maintenance time required. AlabamaConnect's approach was to provide the Service Providers access to update their information via a secure logon thereby ensuring the information provided to the public was current and accurate. In an effort to have providers continue to update their data, AlabamaConnect deployed an automated notification system. When a Provider's data becomes more than six months old a reminder is sent via email. As an incentive for providers to maintain their information, AlabamaConnect uses a ranking system based on data updates. When a consumer searches for services, the Providers returned are listed according to most currently updated.

AlabamaConnect provides two tools to assist in locating services. If a

consumer knows the specific service needed, they can locate a service provider either by name, county or within a 30 mile radius of a given address. While some might know what they need, others might be unsure or not know what is available. For these, AlabamaConnect has a 12 question self assessment that assists in determining what services are available, and based on their responses a list of Providers is returned. Both tools employ Google mapping services to provide a map of the Service Providers' locations. We also needed an application to assist our ADRCs with visits to the centers. AlabamaConnect allows the ADRCs to gather information on these visits to assist in locating services, provide referrals and conduct follow-ups as well as search the Department of Senior Services database to view any services the client might have received.

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.)

AlabamaConnect was developed in house by the I.T. staff of the Alabama Department of Senior Services using existing development software. The approximate cost to date has been less than \$50,000.

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

A monthly server lease of \$300.

16. How is the program funded?

AlabamaConnect is funded through our Administrative Operational Budget out of the State's General Fund.

17. Did this program require the passage of legislation, executive order or regulations?

No.

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

Hardware: HP Server, Software: Windows Server, SQL Server, and Microsoft.Net

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.

To our knowledge, most all states have some sort of online service provider listing; however, we haven't been able to find another site that has the unique elements of AlabamaConnect.

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

While most states maintain a web site for consumers to locate services, Alabama Connect is the only one we are aware of that includes the following:

- interactive service locator
- self assessment
- service provider mapping features
- automated notification system for providers
- allows Service Providers to be active participants in providing information to our seniors and clients with disabilities.

21. Has the program been fully implemented?

Yes

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

AlabamaConnect has been effective in providing current and accurate information to consumers.

- Public Access to information and services – Since its inception in January 2007, AlabamaConnect has had more than 400,000 hits. Searches can be analyzed to see what types of services are most searched and in what county. This provides valuable information on how to best use state and local resources.
- ADRC Information and Referral System – ADRCs have logged more than 5,000 visits in the past 12 months. Of the visits logged, 50% have been identified needing subsequent help. ADRCs can now follow-up to ensure visitors have received needed assistance.
- Provider Information – At the heart of AlabamaConnect is the accuracy of Service Provider information. In the past 12 months, more than 700 providers have accessed and updated their information.

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

While the basic concept for AlabamaConnect has not changed, we expect to add more features in the future.

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

An obstacle some states might face is the acceptance by Service Providers. Alabama actively encourages Service Providers to use AlabamaConnect. Letters were sent to all Providers to ask for their participation and meetings were conducted throughout the state to explain AlabamaConnect.