

2009 Innovations Awards Program APPLICATION

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ID # (assigned by CSG): 09-W-12UT

Please provide the following information, adding space as necessary:

State: Utah

Assign Program Category (applicant): Government Operations

1. **Program Name:** Utah Public Meeting Notice Website (PMN)
2. **Administering Agency:** Partnership between Utah State Archives, Department of Technology Services, and Utah Interactive
3. **Contact Person (Name and Title):** Patricia Smith-Mansfield, Director, Utah State Archives and Records Service
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6. **FAX Number:** 801-531-3867
7. **E-mail Address:** pmansfie@utah.gov
8. **Web site Address:** <http://pmn.utah.gov>
9. **Please provide a two-sentence description of the program.**

The Utah Public Meeting Notice (PMN) Website is a web-based application developed by the Utah Division of Archives and Records Service, the Office of Legislative Research and General Council, the Department of Technology Services, and Utah Interactive that reaches across state and local government lines to provide the citizens of Utah with a single, online location where information regarding all public meeting and bond hearing notices in the state can easily be obtained. Centralizing this information improves transparency and greatly simplifies citizen ability to stay informed on matters of local and state government.

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 2, 2009 to be considered.

Utah's Public Meeting Notice Website was released on April 1, 2008, so data entry by government entities could begin. Government entity participation was mandated on October 1, 2008.

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

Prior to the creation of PMN, various government entities statewide posted meeting and bond hearing notices on individual websites, in newspapers, and on public viewing boards. The process was costly and ineffective at offering transparency into public meetings. In an answer to public demand that government meetings become more transparent, legislation was introduced to create a single, online billboard of public meetings, regardless of the government level (state, county, city, schools, or special districts).

Once the legislation was passed, the Division of Archives proceeded to create the online billboard. They engaged the Office of Legislative Research and General Counsel to assure the law was being interpreted correctly. The Division of Archives, the Department of Technology Services, and Utah Interactive developed the online billboard. What resulted was nation's first public meeting website to be fully integrated at the state and local level with mandated participation.

The objective of the Utah Public Meeting Notice Website is to improve the transparency and efficiency of government through increased accessibility of meeting and bond hearing notices for citizens of Utah. PMN has already centralized the notice information for 875 various government entities statewide. Over 2,001 public bodies within those state, county, city, school district, and special service district entities have registered and are able to publish notices for public search.

The new site increases transparency, enabling Utahns to search, subscribe, and participate in government meetings throughout the state. Citizens may search by keyword or government entity to find public meetings. Alternatively, citizens may browse all the meetings in their city or county, including school districts and special service districts. Citizens can subscribe to receive notifications on notices for public bodies and can choose to receive them via RSS feed and/or email. Notifications are sent to subscribers when new notices are published, updated, or cancelled. Visitors can access the details associated with both past and upcoming public meetings, including the address, date, time, and agenda.

The PMN program is more efficient, providing state and municipal offices with a free, online service in posting public meeting and hearing notices. Each public body will save on paper costs and time. With the new site, there is no need for posting meeting notices on public viewing boards or duplicate the information on their individual websites.

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

With the mandated government entity participation, the Public Meeting Notice application went through necessary phases to develop the complete, centralized website. The project began in March 2007, was fully deployed on April 1, 2008, and government entities were mandated to participate on October 1, 2008.

PMN Timeline

March 2007: Charter Phase – Project was defined at a high level, communication paths were set, and the basic workflow for the project was determined.

April 2007: Requirements and Design Phase - Business requirements were documented and technical requirements mapped. The application was designed initially using a basic prototype. The user interface was also designed during this phase.

April – October 2007: Construction Phase - Development of the actual code began and a test area became available. The system was carefully built to business requirements and technical specifications.

September 2007– February 2008 - Utah Interactive Internal Testing Phase – The system was tested to assure technical specifications and requirements were met as documented.

January – February 2008: Administrator Phase – A state administrator was hired and information was gathered from state and local government for data entry into the system.

March – April 2008: Utah State Archives & Technology Services Testing Phase - The system was released for state agency testing to assure the business requirements would meet the business needs.

April – September 2008: Implementation/Production Phase - The system, both the public interface and the administration tool, was launched. This allowed time for local and state governments to be entered into the system and adjust their processes. Training was offered statewide and feedback from government administrators was instrumental in refining the functions of the website.

October 2008: Version 2 Release and Mandatory Participation – Based on feedback from administrators statewide a second version was released just prior to mandatory participation. Within the first month, notice information for 875 government entities was centralized and over 2,001 public bodies now are posting notices.

September 2008: PMN Web Service – A web service was created as an alternative to the administrative interface, allowing government entities to add and edit public meeting information automatically from their internal systems. The web service method is ideal for government agencies that already have technology in place for publishing public notices to their individual websites. An example is the Utah State Legislative calendar system. The legislature did not want to update two different systems with public meetings, so they now automatically feed their public meetings, via the web service, into PMN.

June 2009: PMN Widgets – We are currently creating widgets for PMN that will allow government entities to specify (by location, or topic) meetings that they want automatically displayed on their own sites. This will help agencies publish the information not just in PMN (as mandated) but also on their own individual websites without any manual intervention. The widget will also be made available to the general public for those who may have websites or blogs devoted to specific government topics.

PMN Modules

PMN consists of two main online modules. A public site provides Utah citizens the ability to search and view meeting and bond hearing notice details. An administrative site allows public body administrators to draft, post, edit, or cancel notices for the viewing public. These two main modules utilize a variety of innovative features to provide citizens with the ability to stay appraised and involved in both local and state government activities.

The PMN public site - Incorporates a variety of search features that allow users to locate notice information with ease. Among these are: “Simple Search,” “Browse for a Meeting,” and “Advanced Search.” The “Simple Search” contains both Ajax and Keyword search options. PMN has also been site mapped to facilitate the ability of published notices to be picked up by search engines such as Google, thereby making public meetings even more transparent to citizens.

The PMN administrative site - Provides administrative users with the ability to enter and edit meeting and bond notification information on the centralized site. Administrators may automatically email meeting and bond notifications to administratively designated newspaper outlets located across Utah, thus alerting newspapers to the meetings and allowing those designated outlets to choose whether they publish the meeting information or send a representative. As an alternative method to the administrative interface, there is also the aforementioned web service.

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

The new Utah Public Meeting Notice Website is the first of its kind in the nation. The site was designed to offer greater accessibility to public meeting information and encourage greater participation by the public. The site also acts as a central source for all public meeting information statewide with a standardized format for publishing. Utah is the first state to implement a centralized public meeting program that increases transparency, enabling Utahns to search, subscribe, and participate in state or local government meetings throughout the state.

The Public Meeting Notice Website demonstrates three different creative approaches in process:

Transparency – All government meeting information in Utah is now publicly accessible in the most ubiquitous location possible, the Internet.

Cross Government Boundary Integration – Not only were all state agencies involved in this endeavor, but this project also required collaboration with local government, schools, and special districts.

Legislative Involvement – This project would not have been successful without legislatively mandated participation. Without full participation, the PMN website would become just an additional website the public would have to search in order to find meeting information. Because of legislation mandating utilization of PMN, it becomes the standard method for finding a public meeting and the public can locate all meeting notices in a single website.

The Public Meeting Notice Website demonstrates five creative approaches in technology:

List Serv – Software to manage the countless email lists was utilized. These email lists are generated automatically whenever a new public body is created and citizens can select to join a list and receive notifications for specific public bodies when a meeting is added or updated.

RSS – Web feeds of public meetings are created allowing citizens to customize a subscription to meeting information related to their interests.

AJAX – This programming method was employed in several search options to create a user-friendly interface.

Web Service – Used to automate the entry and modification of public notices for entities that already had their own public notification system.

Widgets – Will be employed to ease the automatic posting of meeting notices on individual websites, and further disseminate accurate meeting information.

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.)

Through the partnership that the State of Utah, Department of Technology Services, has with Utah Interactive, the Division of Archives was able to have the application fully developed and launched for \$45,000. This price included the development team, testing, hardware infrastructure, initial hosting and storage, and Listserv technology for transmitting email and RSS notifications. The majority of the start-up costs were subsidized by the private partner.

The program also required the state to hire one dedicated project manager to administer PMN.

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

The total annual maintenance cost for Utah’s Public Meeting Notice is \$31,000. The bundled maintenance fee includes the following:

- Security maintenance
- Universal Master Directory maintenance
- Hosting and storage
- Technical support
- Dedicated product management contact
- Projected high user traffic and necessary bandwidth
- Software maintenance
- ListServ maintenance
- Marketing assistance

Staffing paid for by the state includes a dedicated project manager for administration.

16. How is the program funded?

While Utah Interactive was able to subsidize the majority of development costs, the remainder (\$45,000) was paid for with money appropriated by the legislature in conjunction with the passage of the legislation enacting the Public Meeting Notice Website.

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

Yes. The Utah State Legislature passed UCS 63F-1-701 in the 2007 General Session. The Utah Public Meeting Notice Website is the first public meeting website to mandate government participation by legislation.

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

In order to operate and administer PMN, there were many requirements to make the application efficient. Several innovative technologies, software, and equipment were incorporated into the project to ensure high performance and facilitate better communication with the public.

- ListServ – Email list management software
- RSS – Web feed notification
- AJAX – Programming method
- MySQL 5 Database – combines enterprise-grade reliability and performance with advanced SQL 2003 standard-compliant features to ensure protection of sensitive information
- JAVA – The programming language used to develop the project

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.

Yes. The site is the nation's first public meeting website that is fully integrated at the state and local level. The innovative program originated with Representative John Dougall.

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

There are a number of other states that do have online meeting notice programs. The meeting notices generally provide meeting notices for a single government office or agency. The programs in other states lack the full integration across state and local government that PMN provides. The Utah Public Meeting Notice website is the first of its kind in the nation and is fully integrated at the state and local level.

No other program is fully integrated across state and local government levels.

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

Yes. PMN has been fully implemented since April 1, 2008. Due to the effectiveness that PMN has demonstrated up to this point, the Utah State Legislature is expanding the types of notices that are required to be posted on the website. Legislation passed in the 2009 General Session now

requires public notices for general plan amendments, long-range plan, and capital facilities plan amendments to be posted on PMN.

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

The Public Meeting Notice program has proven to be an efficient, web-based application, with many positive outcomes, however there are several lessons that were learned.

Pros

Centralization – PMN has already centralized the notice information for 875 government entities Utah wide. Over 2,001 public bodies within those state, county, city, school district, and special service district entities have already registered and are able to publish notices for public search.

Ease of use – PMN provides administrative users with the ability to send meeting and bond notifications to 70 newspapers located across Utah. There are 2,458 administrative users posting and maintaining notices, an average of 1,487 notices are posted monthly, with 40,870 total citizen visitors in 2008, and many more expected in 2009.

Improves productivity – While the productivity of all government entities involved has increased anecdotally, because only PMN needs to be updated, the Division of Archives can boast that only one state employee is needed to manage the PMN program.

Improves transparency – All government meeting information in Utah is now publicly accessible in the most ubiquitous location possible, the Internet.

Saves paper – The new process transforms the previous paper process into a fully electronic process, thus eliminating the need for paper. With 1,487 monthly meeting notices previously posted in a paper format in multiple locations, the innovative process is more efficient.

The overall success of the program, however, is being measured by its utilization:

- 875 government entities
- 2,001 public bodies posting notices
- 17,844 notices posted annually (extrapolated based on data collected to this point)

A recent survey was created and distributed to citizens and state agencies utilizing PMN. All the feedback received was very positive; here are a few quotes from the survey:

"The Utah Public Notice Website is an innovative, one-stop site delivering citizens with instant access to information about public meetings throughout the state. It is another resource for providing the public with greater transparency into government activities."

"It's fast and easy to use! Everyone is following the same process, using the same format, and the public can access as many as needed in one location."

"The Utah Public Notice Website provides easy access to upcoming public meeting information and preserves these records of public meetings. The website is a valuable public service, providing essential public records on state and community levels of history and government accountability."

“I like the web site. It is easy and a great way to communicate public meetings. No problems or drawbacks that I can see.”

Cons

Internet access – With PMN being a web-based application, the program is limited to those with Internet access. But developing a new web-based program was not a difficult decision when researching home Internet usage in Utah. One recent report from the U.S. Census Bureau shows that Utah ranks as one the highest in the nation for home Internet usage. Sixty-three percent of households in Utah have access to the Internet in their home, many more in comparison with newspaper circulation.

Computer usage – The PMN site was built around technology and innovation. Obviously, there are people that do not use computers and won't have access to the meeting notices.

No email address – With the technology behind PMN, citizens can subscribe to receive notifications on notices for public bodies and can choose to receive them via RSS feed and/or email. Some people do not have an email account but with an RSS feed they are able to overcome that obstacle.

Sufficient time frame – The major lesson learned was the time that was necessary to test, train, and gain intergovernmental support for an online service. While it would have been much quicker to launch the service and mandate usage at the same time, it would not have been effective. There was a six-month time period, before meeting notices were mandatory, where the system was live and agencies were able to try the system and request features. They were able to become trained on the system, and the Division of Archives was able to build support for PMN.

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

Even though the program met its original goal of providing an online location where state citizens can search for, and receive notifications of, public notices from across the state of Utah, the pilot program provided helpful improvement feedback. As a result, additional features were added making the program even more efficient:

- **PMN web service** – As an alternative method of publishing notices on the PMN public site, PMN includes a web service that provides government entities with the ability to publish and update notices in PMN without having to login and use the PMN Administrative site. The web service method is ideal for government agencies that already have technology in place that they use to publish public notices to their individual websites.
- **Site mapping** – PMN has been site mapped to facilitate the ability of published notices to be picked up by search engines such as Google and thereby provide citizens with another avenue to locate notices and get involved.
- **PMN Widget** – We are currently in the process of building a PMN widget that will allow government entities the ability to select the public meetings in which they are interested (by public body or location) and post those dynamically to their own website. This allows for the automated dispersal of public meeting information to websites who choose to display it by setting up and embedding the widget.

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

The Utah Public Meeting Notice program provides a standard, but open, structure for entering meeting information. This has proven to be an efficient and an effective application for the state of Utah and is applicable across all state, local, and federal governments. Centralizing meeting information greatly simplifies citizen ability to stay informed on government matters regardless of the government level. The PMN website makes public meeting transparency a reality in Utah, and could be implemented just as easily in other states.

With any change, there are always obstacles or growing pains. The main obstacle states may run into is having the legislature mandate government participation. Without it, the program could be difficult to implement and gain support. Also, the PMN program was possible because of the public-private partnership that the State of Utah has with Utah Interactive and their self-funded model and ability to subsidize the majority of the costs.

One concern raised by some local government staff was the process change from traditional notification practices and notification on their individual websites. Concerns were eased by providing a way for entities to directly link to specific notices so they can provide that link on their own website and will be entirely removed with the addition of the PMN widget.

Save in .doc or rtf. Return completed application electronically to innovations@csg.org or mail to:

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This application is also available at www.csg.org, in the Programs section.

Deadline: March 23, 2009