

## 2010 Innovations Awards Application

Deadline EXTENDED!: March 15, 2010

ID # (assigned by CSG): 10-E-14NY

**Please provide the following information, adding space as necessary:**

State: \_\_NEW YORK\_\_

Assign Program Category (applicant): *Government Operations and Technology / Information Systems - Public Information*

1. Program Name

New York State Senate, Open Senate Initiative

2. Administering Agency

New York State Senate, Office of the CIO

3. Contact Person (Name and Title)

Nathanial Freitas, Open Senate Technical Lead

4. Address

250 Broadway, Suite 2033, New York, NY 10007

5. Telephone Number

718-569-7272

6. FAX Number

n/a

7. E-mail Address

freitas@senate.state.ny.us

8. Web site Address

<http://open.nysenate.gov>

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

Open Senate is an online "Gov 2.0" program intended to make the Senate one of the most transparent, efficient, and participatory legislative bodies in the nation. Participatory websites were developed for all 62 Senators and more than 40 Senate Committees, and integrated with social networking tools; data portals for publishing and receiving public comment on all administrative and legislative data were deployed; use of open-source software, open data

standards, and cloud-based-hosting services minimized the cost of these innovations.

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, 2010 to be considered.

March 2009

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

- Over-dependency on expensive, commercial software from single vendor (IBM)
  - Fractured website strategy, with each Senate office hosting their own website, with different user experience, content policies
  - Lack of transparency of the legislative process from online users; difficult and expensive to find, access, share legislative data
  - No adoption of modern web standards, technologies or licenses
- Inability to recruit, attract tech community talent and interest

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

- Unify the websites for all 62 of the Majority AND Minority Senator offices into a single website with microsites for each Senator and, for the first time ever, microsites for each Legislative Committee - launched NYSenate.gov May 2009
  - Became the first legislative body to draft and adopt a Creative Commons Plus copyright for all content - launch on NYSenate.gov May 2009
  - Launched Open Data section of NYSenate.gov for publishing of budgets, reports and other FOILable government data - June 2009
  - Publish legislative data (bills, agendas, votes, transcripts, etc) in realtime to the Web so that it is discoverable, shareable by constituents - launched OpenLegislation.NYSenate.Gov July 2009
  - Adopted a dual FreeBSD and GPLv3 open-source software license for all programming code written by the Senate, implemented public source code repository on GitHub, and published an API (Application Programming Interface) through which third-party programmers can leverage Senate data for their own unique online applications - July 2009
  - Implemented an internal collaborative, project management and code management system - launched SenateDev portal - August 2009
- Live video streaming of all Senate Sessions, Committee Meetings, and Public Hearings - launched on NYSenate.gov Video January 2010

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

- Public sector adoption of the tools, policies, licenses and organizational best practices proven to drive technology innovation in the entrepreneurial private sector.
  - Recruitment of new, top talent from open-source and entrepreneurial startup communities in New York City, paired with experienced Senate employees in Albany
  - Utilization exclusively of open-source software and standards.
  - Deep integration of public sector websites with free or low cost web-based services (e.g.: Twitter, Facebook, Livestream, YouTube), in order to reduce the cost of delivering information to, and sourcing information from, citizens.

- Use of cloud-based computing and hosting services to develop and host public sector websites at lower cost and with greater reliability than possible with internal hosting resources.
- Management and online publishing of live video and related event metadata for 100s of live events each year
- Third party developers are using the Senate's API to write applications that access Senate data and deliver additional value to citizens, without requiring any work by or incurring any cost to the Senate (e.g.: <http://www.voiceingov.org/blog/?p=1005>)
- Hundreds of existing Senate staff who have been successfully trained to manage content specific content areas on NYSenate.gov (e.g.: content for a specific Senator's microsite)

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.)*

- New desktop equipment (4 new computers, 8 monitors from inventory, and new office setup in existing Senate office building in New York City)
  - Approximately \$100,000 of outside consulting work to design and implement the initial NYSenate.gov website
  - Hiring of new NYC and Albany staff to implement new strategy; staff specifically relevant to this project are:
    - The Senate's first-ever Chief Information Officer
    - A full-time project manager for NYSenate.gov
    - A full-time programmer for NYSenate.gov
    - A half-time programmer for OpenLegislation.NYSenate.gov
- Ongoing website hosting costs for NYSenate.gov and OpenLegislation.NYSenate.gov varies based on web traffic, but \$1,000 per month

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

- Salaries for the staff roles listed above in Question 14
- Annual hosting/bandwidth costs of less than \$20,000

16. How is the program funded?

- From existing budget allocated by the Secretary of the Senate for administrative units of the Senate

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

No. The program began in March 2009, with initial implementation in May 2009 with the launch of NYSenate.gov. However, support and guidance for the program's ongoing expansion was provided by the passage of Senate Resolution number 2844 on July 15, 2009, which amended Senate Rules to establish a variety of explicit requirements for transparency, such as live webcasting of all official Senate events.

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

- Drupal Content Management System (CMS) Platform
  - Apache, Apache Tomcat, MySQL, PHP, Java, Ruby

- RedMine.org Project Management System
- Linux-based servers hosted in NY Senate Albany data center
- Acquia.com and Amazon Web Services cloud-based hosting services

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; key staff are:
  - Noel Hidalgo (NYSenate.gov director): 250 Broadway, 20th Floor, New York, NY 10007; 212.298.5520; hidalgo@senate.state.ny.us
  - Nathan Freitas (OpenLegislation.NYSenate.gov director): 250 Broadway, 20th Floor, New York, NY 10007; 212.298.5538; freitas@senate.state.ny.us
  - Andrew Hoppin (New York State Senate Chief Information Officer): 250 Broadway, 20th Floor, New York, NY 10007; 212.298.5531; hoppin@senate.state.ny.us

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

We are aware of some States legislatures using social networking tools, some legislatures live streaming events, and some legislatures publishing their legislative and administrative information online, but we are not aware of any doing all of these things, nor any using the "open" methodologies we employ of open-source software, open data standards, creative commons copyright, and cloud-based on-demand hosting services, and an open API.

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

NO

Ongoing Feature Development: Development of NYSenate.gov and Open Legislation service continue - both are in active development, with new features rolled out every few weeks in response to public and/or Senator requests

Mobile Access: The NY Senate Mobile site and app is being developed to provide even broader access to the Senate's services and content

Expansion of Available Data: Additional Senate data sets need to be converted into open formats and published through the Open Data and Open Legislation systems

Expansion to Cover Internal Enterprise IT: Hundreds of legacy internal business applications running internally on proprietary platforms will be redeveloped using open-source software and open standards as web-based applications

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

CON: While the majority of Senate offices have migrated to publishing their content via the new websites, there are a few holdouts who don't feel it offers the level of personal customization and control they desire. In addition, while most offices are interested in using social media tools to reach their constituents, they don't always have the requisite training or staff to effectively leverage these tools.

PRO: Prior to 2009, the New York State Senate was widely regarded as one of the most opaque and even corrupt legislatures in the country; today, we believe that New Yorkers with access to a

computer or mobile phone have more access to legislative, administrative, and official event information, and have more ways to communicate with their elected officials, than citizens in any other State. Leading open government and technology advocates agree- see testimonials here: HYPERLINK "http://bit.ly/9Kh3uB" <http://bit.ly/9Kh3uB>

23. How has the program grown and/or changed since its inception?  
Initially began with a focus on empowering Senators and their staff to better publish information online, and helping citizens to more easily find this information  
Expanded to incorporate public comment / feedback on all legislation  
Expanded to provide for more and more automated creation and maintenance of a vast array of content and metadata associated with official Senate events  
Now our websites serve as data publishing platforms that which are being programmatically leveraged, thanks to our feeds, open data formats, and APIS, by third parties to add additional value to this content  
Now expanding our "open" approach to redesigning how internal information is managed and shared between Senate employees and other branches of government

24. What limitations or obstacles might other states expect to encounter if they attempt to adopt this program?  
Recruitment of core technology talent is critical. Having in-house, full-time expertise is critical to success. This is not about consultants.  
Entrenched political turf wars can impede the adoption of open-standards and common shared platforms.