

## **2010 Innovations Awards Application**

Deadline: March 1, 2010

ID # (assigned by CSG): **10-MW-13KS**

Please provide the following information, adding space as necessary:

**State:** Kansas

**Assign Program Category** (applicant):

Infrastructure and Economic Development/Transportation

### **1. Program Name**

Kansas Transportation Online Community

### **2. Administering Agency**

Kansas Department of Transportation

### **3. Contact Person** (Name and Title)

Julie Lorenz, Director of Public Affairs

### **4. Address**

700 S.W Harrison Street, 2-W  
Topeka, Kansas 66603-3745

### **5. Telephone Number**

785-296-3276

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785-296-0287

### **7. E-mail Address**

jlorenz@ksdot.org

### **8. Web site Address**

www.ktoc.net

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

K-TOC is a unique, state-operated online community devoted to transportation issues, the first such government-operated community of its kind. It provides a platform on which to engage citizens directly, allowing the Department to bypass conventional media filters, and also to receive unmediated input from members of the public, who are permitted to launch discussion groups, post blogs and files, and leave comments.

**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.

K-TOC was launched January 15, 2009.

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

Government has few tools available that permit it to harness the power of online social networks. K-TOC provides the Department an online vehicle to directly engage citizens and actively participate in public discussions of Department policies.

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

KDOT first had to find and come to an agreement with an appropriate software vendor, which took about two months, as at the time no social media vendor was serving the government market. Potential vendors were asked to make a number of changes to their off-the-shelf community platforms, including increasing the amount of client-configurable space on the page and re-coding the basic platform to ensure that it would be compliant with Section 508 of the Disabilities Act. Not all vendors were able or willing to meet these requirements.

Once a vendor was in place, a series of meetings were held with the Department's executive staff to foster institutional support for the project. Between November 2008 and January 2009, the Agency worked closely with the software provider to ensure the community platform offered the full suite of desired functions. The Department then promoted the community within a group of more than 3,000 transportation stakeholders in Kansas, creating a knowledgeable seed audience prior to opening the doors to the general public in mid-January 2009.

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

Insofar as we can determine, at the time of its launch K-TOC was the only government-operated online community in the world.

**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.)

Leverage Software, the vendor with which KDOT operates K-TOC, charged about \$50,000 to build the community and to host it for the first year. The Department hired one additional staff member to manage the community at a cost of about \$50,000 per year.

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

Annual operating costs, including staff, are about \$70,000.

**16. How is the program funded?**

K-TOC is funded through KDOT's Bureau of Computer Services.

**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?**

K-TOC is hosted on servers maintained by Leverage Software, of San Francisco, California. Use of the community's software is leased by KDOT from Leverage Software on a software-as-a-service arrangement.

**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.

Julie Lorenz, Director of Public Affairs, KDOT (see above)

Kyle Schneewis, Director of Governmental Affairs, KDOT (see above)

Patrick Quinn, Office of Public Affairs, KDOT (see above)

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

Per the Pew Center for the Internet and American Life, K-TOC was a unique entity on the date of its launch, with only whitehouse.gov offering some similar functionalities to the public.

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

The community is operational and active, but we think we only just begun to tap its potential. Right now the Office of Public Affairs is studying ways to integrate K-TOC into all of the Department's public information efforts. These efforts range from the simple (printing K-TOC's web address on all press releases) to the more complex (integrating K-TOC's discussion forums with the Department's existing construction project online information portal). We are also examining ways to increase the community's usefulness to KDOT as an in-house communications platform for purposes such as collaborative project planning.

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

During normal operation, the community attracts about 70 unique visitors per day. On its second day of operation, the Public Works Director for a regional Native American tribe used the community to approach the Department about a long-standing dispute between the tribe and KDOT over plans for a turn lane on a U.S. highway. We were able to resolve that dispute in 24 hours.

In autumn 2009, KDOT launched an innovative public initiative on the community designed to harvest popular input on KDOT's project-selection process. The Department evaluated more than 140 proposed construction projects and posted the evaluations on K-TOC. The posted materials included engineering evaluations from Department engineers and—unusually—economic-impact analyses of each project that attempted to estimate the effect of the proposed project on the local economy. KDOT requested that community members examine the department's findings and provide any additional information they thought appropriate. That community initiative resulted in hundreds of members downloading files from K-TOC and dozens of public comments.

The government audience does not adapt as readily to social media as the audience at large. It has taken more than a year for the community to attract a significant number of proactive members prepared to post comments and information on their own initiative, and such activity is still intermittent.

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

Community membership has grown steadily since launch and is approaching 950.

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

Government applications of social media are limited by policies and procedures written for traditional media outlets, and by internet policies that are distrustful of social sites such as

Facebook and Twitter. These policies and procedures must be modified prior to undertaking a project like K-TOC.

KDOT addressed these concerns by positioning K-TOC as a “professional” site, and not merely a social site. This has proved highly effective over the first year of the community’s life. Official participation is high—representatives of agencies in more than two dozen states have joined K-TOC—and the incidence of spam postings has been extremely low.

Effective social media projects also require agencies to accept that they will be operating websites over which they do not exercise complete control, as the whole point of social media is to permit all users the ability to post independent content.