



The Council of State Governments
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2011 Innovations Awards Application

DEADLINE: MARCH 28, 2011

ID # (assigned by CSG): 2011- _____

Please provide the following information, adding space as necessary:

State: NEBRASKA

Assign Program Category (applicant): REVENUE (Use list at end of application)

- | | |
|------------------------------------|---|
| 1. Program Name | Legislative Bill Tracking System |
| 2. Administering Agency | Nebraska Department of Revenue |
| 3. Contact Person (Name and Title) | Len Sloup, Director of Operations & Administrative Services |
| 4. Address | 301 Centennial Mall South, Lincoln, NE 68509 |
| 5. Telephone Number | 402-471-5805 |
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| 8. Web site Address | www.revenue.ne.gov |

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

The Legislative Bill Tracking System is a workflow software product developed internally by employees of the Nebraska Department of Revenue (Department). The system facilitates the process of crafting [fiscal notes](#) through each stage of development; from initial request, through management approval, and finally, submission to the [Legislative Fiscal Office \(LFO\)](#).

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 28, 2011 to be considered.

The concept for this project was developed in August 2009 and implemented in January 2010.

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

- Fiscal notes require the work of nearly a dozen people to complete. Over a decade ago, the Department faced the onerous task of routing approximately 100-125 fiscal notes through a completely paper-based system. Under Nebraska's Unicameral system, all bills receive a public hearing, and all bills have a fiscal note available at the hearing. This requires the bulk of the fiscal notes to be completed in a six week period near the start of the legislative session.
- In 2001, the Department developed a Lotus Notes-based system alleviating the need to shuffle paper among the various participants in the fiscal note process. However, while fiscal note creation productivity

increased, the Lotus Notes system faced technical limitations, and did not alleviate the need to keep paper files of completed fiscal notes.

- In 2009, the Department’s Applications Development Section developed an Oracle-based replacement to the Lotus Notes system which significantly improved upon its predecessor.
- While the Lotus Notes system assisted in managing the workflow for fiscal note process, the Oracle system introduces new capabilities, and becomes a digital repository for each fiscal note. The Oracle system allows more than one person at a time to access and edit a fiscal note record. It allows users to upload attachments, including spreadsheets, emails, scanned items, and any other related materials. In addition, the Oracle system approval process serves as a digital signature, eliminating the need for the Tax Commissioner to initial a paper copy of the final fiscal note, and for the Department to retain a paper copy of the signed document.
 - Efficiency is improved through automatic email notification. All users, according to their specific roles, are immediately sent an email alerting them that their attention is needed and provides a link to the relevant fiscal note. All bills and fiscal notes are searchable using bill number or keyword in the current or archived legislative sessions.
 - Accountability is enhanced with the tracking of important dates in the process, including LFO due dates, hearing dates, and approval dates. The notes can easily be sorted by due date and stage of production (costing, needing management approval, etc.) on the dashboard enabling Research Analysts to prioritize work. The system also tracks the actions of all users and a unique record is stored allowing the Tax Commissioner’s final approval to serve as a digital signature for each note.
 - Transparency is improved with the ability for all users to view the entire fiscal note record, including the synopsis, costing, attachments, comments, and related notes. The comments are automatically distributed through real-time emails. The comments can also be used by synopsis writers to clarify items in the bill, to address questions, etc. Comments are archived with the fiscal note so later users can benefit from reading related discussion.

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

The fiscal note request is received from LFO.

1. The Research Administrator assigns the request to a Research Analyst.
2. The Research Analyst creates a record in the Legislative Bill Tracking System.
3. A copy of the bill is attached to the record.
4. The bill is “Sent for Synopsis.”
5. The Synopsis Writer completes the summary (“Synopsis Completed”).
6. The bill is “Sent for Costing.”
7. All the Costers complete their estimates (“Costing Completed”).
8. The Research Analyst prepares and attaches the initial draft of the fiscal note.
9. Research Administrator reviews and approves, or requests changes.
10. Directors review and approve, or request changes.
11. Tax Commissioner reviews and approves, or requests changes.
12. The completed fiscal note is sent to LFO.

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

- The status of the bill changes as it moves through the process and is noted in the system for easy reference.
- Email notifications are sent to inform each participant of their responsibilities. A series of role-dependent reports are available, allowing users to easily search for fiscal note records that require their attention, or track fiscal note progress through the system.
- Comments can be made at any stage of the process for anyone to see.
- Fiscal notes from past sessions, including from the old Lotus Notes system, are archived in the Oracle system.
- A record can be started and maintained under a “Watched” status. These are bills where no fiscal note request has been made, but could affect the Department if amended during the legislative process. When a fiscal note request is received, a request for synopsis changes the status from “Watched” to “Fiscal Note in Progress.”
- The Oracle system allows for multiple users to simultaneously access the same fiscal note record.
- The Research Administrator can assign and monitor fiscal note progress of the Research staff.
- Legislative session outcomes are summarized, by bill, for budget and human resource use.

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.)

The project cost was approximately \$40,000 and involved approximately 1,380 staff hours to develop.

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

There are minimal annual operational costs. They are primarily the cost of maintaining the database platform and making system changes as requested. The average annual cost is less than \$3,000.

16. How is the program funded?

This program is funded through the Department’s General Fund appropriation.

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 software was developed using the Oracle database platform. The programming language is PL/SQL using the Oracle Application Express framework.

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 the best of our knowledge, no state has a tracking system that goes beyond assigning fiscal notes.

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

No

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

Yes

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

- Before the Lotus Notes system, the Department hired an intern to work 30 hours per week to distribute information to the various individuals involved in the process, and to keep track of the files. This position was eliminated, without any disruption in the flow of the fiscal note process.
- The upgraded Oracle system streamlines the process, as more than one person can access a fiscal note record at a time. This eliminates the bottlenecks that occurred during the costing and review processes.
- Prior to the Lotus Notes system, the Research Administrator had to physically manage much of the approval process. This was reduced somewhat by the Lotus Notes system, but with the Oracle system, much more time is available to review the final product, which helps to eliminate errors or inconsistencies in the final product.

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

We have adjusted and added user roles to fit the needs and changes in Departmental organization. A role was added for a Legislative Liaison, to provide email notifications for changes to fiscal notes in all areas.

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

The system is very flexible, but it remains to be seen how the Legislative Bill Tracking system would need to be modified to track fiscal notes in a traditional bicameral legislature. The Nebraska system has no reference to committee, or to work out differences between House and Senate versions of bills. This may need to be programmed into a system for any other state.

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2011 Innovations Awards Application Program Categories and Subcategories

Use these as guidelines to determine the appropriate Program Category for your state's submission and list that program category on page one of this application. Choose only one.

Infrastructure and Economic Development

- Business/Commerce
- Economic Development
- Transportation

Government Operations and Technology

- Administration
- Elections
- Information Systems
- Public Information
- Revenue
- Telecommunications

Health & Human Services

- Aging
- Children & Families
- Health Services
- Housing
- Human Services

Human Resources/Education

- Education
- Labor
- Management
- Personnel
- Training and Development
- Workforce Development

Natural Resources

- Agriculture
- Energy
- Environment
- Environmental Protection
- Natural Resources
- Parks & Recreation
- Water Resources

Public Safety/Corrections

- Corrections
- Courts
- Criminal Justice
- Drugs
- Emergency Management
- Public Safety

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

CSG Innovations Awards 2011
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Lexington, KY 40578-1910

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This application is also available at www.csg.org.