

IACA Merit Award Submission

Jurisdiction: Hawaii

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Description of the Innovation: Hawaii implemented an automated fee and file accountability project that automated the process of checking that online files were being properly sent to us and the correct fees were being charged. For any states that are working with NIC affiliates, this is a significant innovation especially in light of Hawaii's fiscal concerns and our continual efforts to use technology to improve government accountability.

The problem: Our NIC-affiliate, Hawaii Information Consortium (HIC), takes in our filing requests online and forwards the online files to us for our division to process. Prior to our new accountability project, HIC calculated their cut of the fees and billed us a total amount. There was no easy way for us to check the accuracy of the fees charged to us or the accuracy of the actual filings that were successfully sent to us. Sometimes, HIC would send files and they would not arrive but we would not know until the public called with complaints. Although files could be missing for a while, HIC would still bill us and we could not pinpoint the discrepancies. In addition, we had no way to check that the fees HIC was charging were correct, unless we went through a long manual checking process.

The new solution: The new automated fee and file accountability project changed all this. The project required our NIC-affiliate HIC to provide us an electronic report with a breakdown of each online filing that they believed had been sent to us and the fees they thought were correct for that specific filing. On our business registration side, our IT staff developed a matching electronic report of each filing that we *actually* received and the fees *we* believed were correct. Our IT staff then developed an automated program that runs a comparison of the two reports, flags inconsistencies and calculates the total bill we believe should be paid to HIC. Our staff merely had to look at the comparison report to quickly identify any fee or file discrepancies and to look at the flagged items to know where the problems lie.

Results of Implementation:

With this automated report and comparison system, we have been able to easily and quickly identify any missing files and have been able to contact HIC and resolve the matter before online customers are even aware of the problem. This has improved customer service, reduced complaints and increased our ability to quickly find the problem. We have also been able to easily identify and pinpoint billing discrepancies. When our total does not match HIC's billing total, we can easily find the mismatched file through the flags on the comparison report. We are able to account for each cost and we have improved the accuracy for our cashiers and accounting staff.

Overall benefits: This project is not a flashy improvement that we can show to the public but in terms of government accountability and efficiency, it has been a great success. The automated technology has reduced the time-consuming manual labor of identifying missing files and inconsistent billing problems. We can show our accounting to our NIC-affiliate and easily work through problems. It has made our work a lot more efficient and improved service for online user.

Lessons learned: This project took about 18 months to complete in part due to the need to integrate HIC's reporting system with our own reporting system and providing a final comparison report that met the needs of our cashier/accounting staff. Making the reports match and work for cashier/accounting staff took a lot more time than we'd thought. If we had to do it again, we'd recommend appointing a person from each area early in the process to lead the effort so that feedback and response could be better coordinated. This might have reduced the time for implementation. But in the end, we could not be happier with our final results and the lesson there is that it has all been worth it.