2011 NASCIO Recognition Award Application

Cross-Boundary Collaboration and Partnerships

West Virginia Office of Technology
Statewide Local E-Government Implementation & Adoption

West Virginia Office of Technology
Kyle Schafer, Chief Technology Officer
Capitol Building #5 – 10th Floor
Charleston, WV 25305
304.558.8100

B. Executive Summary

West Virginia is comprised of 55 counties with more than 230 municipalities. Due to the economic conditions of the state, most local governments function on a very limited budget and do not have the resources (budget and personnel) to build or sustain a web presence. The Statewide Local E-Government Implementation & Adoption Program was conceived as a means to grow West Virginia's local government web presence through a coordinated investment of public and private resources. In 2007, when this project started, less than 50% of county governments and less than 20% of municipal governments had an established web presence.

The West Virginia Office of Technology (WVOT), partnered with the West Virginia Municipal League (WVML), the West Virginia Association of Counties (WVACO), the Community Connect Foundation (CCF), and the West Virginia Department of Education (WVDE), to begin the process of creating a statewide portal for all county and municipal governments. Our goal was to implement and promote E-Government applications and seek ways to ensure participation from all local governments providing services to our citizens.

Through a collaborative effort, a new curriculum for public high school students was created that combined civics education and technology training. This program enabled students to have the opportunity to get out of the classroom and become actively engaged with local government. Through this program, students interacted directly with their local government officials. The information collected through this process was ultimately used to build local government websites. Each participating high school was provided with the technology resources needed to capture the information collected through interviews with public officials, independent online research and input from project partner WVACO.

WVOT provided funding for the hardware and software needed at the high schools, as well as cloud based web hosting services and professional project management. During Phase I of this project, six high schools were selected to begin the E-Government Implementation & Adoption Program. Due to the overwhelming success of the program at these targeted schools, the project has now expanded into a statewide initiative.

> *"The mission of this partnership is to assist our county and municipal governments in developing and sustaining a local government web presence in order to keep our citizenry better informed. We will achieve this mission by leveraging our state's most valuable resource, our youth".*
> -Kyle Schafer, Chief Technology Officer WV

C. Description

In early 2007, the WVOT partnered with CCF to provide assistance in developing project plans for, what seemed to be at the time, three separate and very different initiatives.

The goals of these initiatives were:

- Work with counties and municipalities to increase their web presence. At that time, less than 50% of all West Virginia counties and less than 20% of all municipalities had a web presence. When questioned, counties and municipalities indicated the primary reason for not having a web presence was cost.
- Assist the Department of Education with the integration of new 21st Century Technical Skills into the classroom – specifically, develop a plan to integrate classroom technology with real life situations.
- Work with the Broadband Council to develop E-Government applications that will help promote broadband demand and keep our citizenry better informed.

The WVOT presented a single project plan to address all three initiatives. Specifically, CCF in conjunction with WVOT, applied for, and was awarded grant funding for the development of a Statewide Local E-Government Implementation & Adoption Program that would interject 21st century technology skills into the school's current civics curriculum. CCF communicated the project initiates through the WVACO and WVML, and also visited every participating school. Each school then reached out to their local officials. Schools were provided laptops loaded with Microsoft Office productivity tools, digital cameras and video recorders, and charged with working with locally elected officials to develop E-Government websites for their respective counties and municipalities at no cost to that government entity.

Six municipalities involving six high schools were covered by the initial grant. The new Statewide Local E-Government Implementation & Adoption Program curriculum was introduced into these schools in September 2007. Due to the widespread popularity of this program, grants where approved in April 2008 to broaden the program to include an additional 138 counties and municipalities. Grant dollars were awarded to CCF to expand this program to all remaining high schools across the state and the remaining 124 counties and municipalities. By end of year 2010, all 55 counties in West Virginia had sustainable websites for citizen engagement.

As a bonus, in March 2011, additional grant funding was awarded to the CCF to further streamline the program processes and ensure the accuracy and sustainability of the county and municipality websites developed under this program. This includes the

annual updating of websites by the participating high school students and the implementation of additional interactive applications to further enhance the delivery of local government services.

The concept of incorporating 21st century technology into school civics curriculum and adding value to local governments has gained full support from the current and previous administration.

> *"Developing partnerships among our schools and our government offices is a win-win for everyone involved. These partnerships are an excellent way to help our towns with limited resources develop websites that can serve their citizens and reach out to the world. It's also a great learning tool for our students, who build their skills while finding creative ways to help us all. I can think of no better way to promote the best kept secret in America; West Virginia".*

-US Senator Joe Manchin III, Former Governor

The WVOT provided, at no cost, professional project management and hosting services for all counties and municipalities participating in this program. WVOT utilizes its E-Government partner to provide cloud based hosting for the project. High school civics students are supplied with the equipment and resources by the CCF needed to engage in hands-on activities with local elected officials.

The following equipment has been provided to the participating high schools in all 55 counties of West Virginia:

- **Laptop PC and case with Microsoft Windows OS and Office Professional**
- **Digital Video Camcorder with case and accessories**

4

- **Digital Camera with case and accessories**

The first six high schools started collecting content for their respective counties and municipalities in September of 2007, with the first websites being completed in the fall of 2008. In February 2011, CCF and current Governor Earl Ray Tomblin held a press conference during the WVACO annual meeting acknowledging the successful publishing of an E-Government website for every county in West Virginia.

D. Significance

This program would not have experienced the level of success it has achieved without the collaboration of many organizations. As with most cross-boundary initiatives, the most significant hurdle was obtaining consensus from all the various stakeholders. In order to gain support and begin implementing the project plan, several steps had to be taken:

- WVOT and CCF collaborated with the WVDE to combine civics education with 21st Century Technical Skills.
- WVOT and CCF ensured that this project would allow civics, community service and technology skills to be embraced by local high school students.
- WVOT and CCF presented project information to the WVML and gained support for the project.
- WVOT and CCF presented project information to the WVACO and gained support for the project.
- WVOT and CCF submitted and received multiple grants from The Claude Worthington Benedum Foundation.
- Due to the overwhelming demand and success of this project, WVOT and CCF have received additional grants from AT&T and Verizon.
- WVOT and CCF created Memorandums of Understanding from all partners to ensure project sustainability.

The following is a site developed by High School students from one of West Virginia's most rural and isolated counties, Pocahontas County, for the City of Hillsboro.

Students from Pocahontas High School created the website for the City of Hillsboro at no cost to the municipality. No content is uploaded or changed on the site without the consent of the mayor of Hillsboro. Each new participating class coming into Pocahontas High School will be responsible for enhancing and ensuring the accuracy of the E-Government website.

Since much more information is available, citizens from the rural Hillsboro community are much better informed than before. Much of the information is now available to them 24 hours a day/7 days a week. Citizens also play a role in the ongoing enhancement of the site by making their requests online.

Although counties, municipalities and citizens are seeing tremendous value in this program, students are the real winners. From an educational perspective, students from Pocahontas High School interview city officials and create content for this site. Before this project began, many students did not know and were not familiar with their local government officials or the services they provide. By participating in the Statewide Local E-Government Implementation & Adoption Program, students enhanced their

6

knowledge of local government through face-to-face interviews with local officials. They have also enhanced their technology skills by utilizing digital cameras, digital video recorders and various software tools to capture and digitize content necessary to provide a useful and sustainable E-Government web presence.

E. Benefit of the Project

More and more, individuals are depending on technology to access accurate, timely and reliable government information. It is imperative that state, county and local governments recognize this shift, and strive to accommodate our citizenry.   Although most of our elected officials recognize the need, many of the counties and municipalities in West Virginia did not have the financial or technical resources needed to accomplish this goal prior to the implementation of this program. Implementation has increased demand for enhanced broadband deployment, utilized cloud hosting for its solution, and has provided significant cost control through cost avoidance – three of the top 10 NASCIO State CIO objectives for 2011.

In the beginning, we thought the primary beneficiary of this project would be our citizens, but as this initiative matured, we now see that the students involved in this program are receiving significant value. The students involved with this program have fully embraced the technology and through their own innovation have created some very remarkable websites. Former First Lady Gayle Manchin, received a DVD from Nitro High School, which documented their website development project for the City of Nitro. She was so impressed by the accomplishments of these students that she presented the DVD to the West Virginia Jobs Cabinet. From this video, it is clear that our students have developed advanced technology skills that were used to solve real life issues. It is also apparent that they have learned a tremendous amount of information about our political process. These are all skills that will be transferable to all of their future endeavors.   The total investment in the program through grants has been $410,000.   The benefit to the Counties, Municipalities and students through increased citizenry participation and development of technical skills is invaluable.

This project has been particularly challenging and unique due to the sheer number of stakeholders, but none of these stakeholders would question the success and benefit of the final result. Students are now able to participate in their local governments and gain a better understanding of government and technology. Citizens of these communities are better informed and elected officials are providing a service that is in high demand from their constituents. This project has truly been a Win, Win, Win for all project partners.