

TITLE OF NOMINATION:

The Information Technology Strategic Planning Application for the SMART
Governing Initiative

CATEGORY: Digital Government: Government to Government (G to G)

STATE: Alabama

Executive Summary

In partnership with the Department of Finance, Information Services Division (ISD), Alabama Interactive designed and created the Information Technology Strategic Planning application. This application was developed as a useful tool for state agencies to help improve Alabama Government with no cost to the state agencies or taxpayers. Through technology, agencies now have the capability to submit Information Technology (IT) organizational plans, link plans to budget requests and appropriations, and create meaningful IT performance measurements. In general, this solution was designed to provide State IT Directors with a more user-friendly tool for input of agency-level data.

The previous method included an Excel-based system which required planning staff to extract and load data into a database for analysis and development. This process required time-consuming, manual intervention for the passing of data with the likelihood of unintentionally altering data during the process. Without controlled access and restricted editing, the possibility of formulas being altered was a concern for data integrity.

The SMART Governing Initiative combines strategic planning and performance monitoring with the budgeting process of all of Alabama's state agencies. The SMART process is designed to improve government performance by investing state resources more wisely, promoting better collaboration between agencies and holding all governmental agencies accountable for their actions. This governing cycle, known as SMART, provides:

- **Specific results**
- **Measurable key goals**
- **Accountable to stakeholders**
- **Responsive to customers**
- **Transparent to everyone**

Taking an innovative approach, Alabama Interactive and ISD designed an application to replace the legacy method and help agencies adhere to the governor's SMART program. The new application provides a secure, web-based method which intuitively walks users through the input of their data to populate the planning database. Fail-safes such as help functions, screen edits, error checks, and instructions help the user to ensure proper usage of the application. A dynamic summary page allows users to quickly view their progress and print reports of the data collected.

As the State of Alabama's partner for electronic government services, Alabama Interactive was able to provide the Information Technology Strategic Planning application as an in-kind service, at no cost to the State of Alabama. Alabama Interactive was proud to contribute to the cost savings effort of the state which supports all State departments and agencies in Alabama.

Description of the business problem and solution

The goal behind the IT Strategic Planning application was to simplify the process by which ISD collects future IT budgeting and planning information from each individual agency or department. Taking a complex, painstaking process and simplifying it into a user-friendly, accurate, and cost free web-based system just made sense.

Barriers were limited as ISD and state agencies welcomed the opportunity of the new system designed to decrease the workload of the previous application. A key challenge presented during the early stages of the project was developing detailed functional requirements to meet the specific needs of individual agencies while being operational at any level of government. Alabama Interactive worked closely with ISD to cover all bases and meet all objectives. ISD and Alabama Interactive recognize all departments and agencies do not operate in the same manner. Therefore, the system had to allow agencies to customize their goals, objectives, and most importantly their budgets to reflect the specific needs of each agency.

The new application was developed as an enhancement to the existing SMART budget plan. Some of the challenges from the legacy application were due to the complexity of the process and not having a method to correct human error prior to finalization. The IT Strategic Planning team became quickly burdened with manipulation and correcting common upload mistakes from over 200 entities. The most common errors and challenges included missing fields, corrupted attachments, key punch errors, timeliness of delivery, and mobility of the application to receive updates from multiple location or people.

Alabama Interactive was excited about the opportunity to partner with ISD in making this application a reality. Having worked with the agency before on several projects, Alabama Interactive saw an opportunity to combine resources and knowledge to develop a successful strategic planning application.

Development for the application began in July 2006 and was completed in three weeks. The application was live with sufficient time for state agencies to begin submitting data for the upcoming 2007 year. It did not take long for efficiencies in time and data to become evident to the state. By using the web-based application, agencies were able input information on critical issues, goals, objectives, technology, and budgets directly into the planning database under the guidance of an intuitive toolbar. This toolbar is a step-by-step red light/green light system which guides the user by highlighting progress while monitoring data and error checking. As a result, IT planning and strategic efforts have become less cumbersome for all users while providing stronger data integrity, reduction of labor intensive processes through technology, and delivering state leaders with immediate access to collected information.

The program completed its first year successfully and has since only required a few updates. Alabama Interactive meets once a year with ISD to discuss any new features or updates they would like to include before the application is rolled out for the next operating year. This is a good time to visit with the agency and discuss other opportunities or concerns they may have.

From start to completion, the development of the application took approximately 50 hours and included 5 resources between Alabama Interactive and ISD. As previously mentioned, Alabama Interactive was able to complete the project as an In-Kind service for the State of Alabama. This meant that no charges or direct costs were charged back to the Alabama Department of Finance. The In-Kind service met the needs of the State as it saved them approximately \$12,000 which is the estimated cost of the production application. All hosting, maintenance, and updates are on-going and provided by Alabama Interactive at no cost to the State of Alabama.

Significance to the improvement of the operation of government

The most significant improvement to the operation of government via the IT Strategic Planning application is eliminating the need for manual input of data supporting annual plans and budget items by state agencies. In meeting the needs of the agencies, all data is now submitted through a user friendly, web-based application making data submission easier as well as providing stronger data integrity. Through the use of this application, manual data entry is no longer necessary, removing a costly procedure for the Department of Finance (ISD).

The technologies deployed have enabled the ISD planning staff to more accurately and expeditiously analyze the data provided by the agencies. As a result, each agency is able to submit their Strategic Plan at an earlier date allowing updates and changes as necessary. The flexibility created by the new system allows the agencies to be more precise in the details of their plan. In turn, ISD is able to process each individual plan and correspond with each individual agency, thus ensuring accuracy and productivity in the processing of agency plans.

Data entry and processing time is greatly reduced by the application, reducing labor intensive processes for ISD. The application also reduces the amount of paper received and filed by ISD. Employees from state agencies no longer have to handle or submit any paper documents with their planning objectives.

The new IT Strategic Planning application proved to be successful with 100% adoption by state agencies. Agencies are beginning to realize the full benefits of the system. Functionality, security, accuracy, productivity, and efficiency were all goals achieved by the system. The functionality crosses all boundaries and barriers between each individual agency making it practical for every agency to utilize. A secure Triple DES Encryption ensures data integrity and accuracy

during the transfer from agencies to ISD. Productivity and efficiency means more plans can be processed in a shorter time frame alleviating the workload required of the agency's staff. Improving these aspects of the process with the new system, make the application unique and virtually irreplaceable.

Benefit of the Project

A unique self-funded partnership between the State of Alabama and Alabama Interactive allowed for the application to be developed and maintained at no cost to the State of Alabama or its agencies. Although there were no costs associated with the development of the application, the investment has already been deemed valuable through both a financial and non-financial return. The entire project was a result of a collaborative, public-private effort between the State of Alabama and Alabama Interactive and would have equated to approximately \$12,000 in costs associated with its development.

The return on investment of the IT Strategic Planning Program has not only enabled planning staff to analyze the data provided by the state agencies more accurately but has also improved the availability of the plan by enabling the state to publish the IT Strategic Plan sooner. This amplified the advancement of Governor Bob Riley's goal for the statewide Strategic Plan by promoting accountability and transparency throughout the online program. These non-financial benefits contribute to the federal requirements of the Budget Management Act and promote even greater accountability and transparency throughout the State of Alabama defining a true cross-boundary application which has been adopted by all state agencies.