

2008 NASCIO AWARD NOMINATION

Government: Cross-Boundary Collaboration and Partnerships

Oklahoma Department of Public Safety's
Municipal Court Reporting System



A. Cover Page

Title of Nomination: Oklahoma Department of Public Safety's Municipal Court Reporting System

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B. Executive Summary

In September of 2005, the federal government mandated all commercial drivers license (CDL) convictions must be recorded on a person's driving record within 10 days of conviction, versus the previous 30-day turn around. For Oklahoma, this required a faster more reliable approach which would eliminate the existing paper intensive process. In response, the Oklahoma Department of Public Safety's (DPS) Municipal Court Reporting System provided Oklahoma municipal courts with an online reporting tool. This application enables the courts to communicate with DPS regarding all required information for these convictions. This cross boundary collaborative system is located at <http://www.ok.gov/dps/courts> and can only be accessed by authorized institutions participating in the program.



Before moving their process online, DPS' Record Management personnel were processing approximately 250,000 municipal court convictions, and 73,000 court ordered suspensions, the majority of which were being sent on paper.

"We were experiencing an alarmingly high rate of errors on these documents due to improper name, date of birth, or driver's license numbers," said DPS's Commissioner Kevin Ward.

With the new web-based system, validation features were implemented to assist with the elimination of error rates. In addition, many municipal courts were not sending in their suspension forms due to the difficulty in filling out the former six-page form. Municipal courts can now send a one-page electronic form that can be populated with information from previous submissions. This has enabled the processing of suspension forms and CDL convictions in a timely manner, and has cut down on the number of errors. DPS has also seen an increase in the amount of reporting due to the ease of these online forms.

C. Description

Prior to the launch of the online system in January 2006, DPS was processing approximately 250,000 municipal convictions a year. The majority of those convictions were paper convictions with error rates at about 10 - 15%. In addition to complying with the federal mandate, this high error ratio was a main reason why DPS sought an online program that could provide validation to eliminate the inaccuracies.

DPS partnered with OK.gov, Oklahoma's contracted eGovernment solutions expert to develop the online Oklahoma Municipal Court Reporting System. The online system has addressed other issues, providing opportunities along the way for DPS and participating courts. These include: *(see also Benefit of the Project)*

- Efficient reporting and documentation for DPS and the courts
- Declining error ratio rates reported to DPS
- Reduced paperwork for the agency and the users
- Free to municipalities who utilize the system
- Free customer service and cost savings benefits

Defining the project consisted of collaboration between OK.gov and staff from DPS. From the user's perspective, to the ease of use on the administrative side, the system design utilizes templates, and administrative tools that provide a fully functional application consistent with all OK.gov built applications. The bold and clean appearance of the Oklahoma standardized agency template was implemented into this application, providing a consistent header, footer, and left navigation, throughout the system. The system was developed using PHP 5.1.2 and is supported by an Oracle 10g database. It runs on the Apache 2 Web server and is housed in an IBM Blade Center.

The online service complies fully with the State of Oklahoma Information Security Policy. The system also implements the information security standards set forth in the Sarbanes-Oxley Act of 2002. These standards set forth a stringent security framework to protect the application and the users. Two other security features were added including:

- Programmatic flow control was implemented into the system to prevent users from typing in specific URLs and bypassing normal program operation.
- Automatic logout was incorporated to protect data by logging a user out of the system after a certain amount of inactivity.

In accordance with accessibility standards, all citizens of Oklahoma can access the Municipal Court Reporting System. All services developed for the application meet and exceed these standards, which are based on the Federal Section 508 guidelines.

DPS paid \$33,000 for the development of the system. The system utilizes four administrators and a technical support person. Because these staff members were already in place providing support through the traditional paper process, this does not

provide any additional cost measurements for DPS. Employees from DPS now have more time to devote to other projects and responsibilities.

The system was completed in three separate phases, with additional phases possible as the needs of the courts grow. The description of each phase's functionality and timelines are as follows:

Phase One:

(deployed in January, 2006)

Phase one provided DPS with an administrative interface to begin entering municipal court locations and users to the system. Forms were also incorporated during this phase, enabling municipal courts to provide DPS with required information from a conviction.

Phase Two:

(deployed in January, 2007)

Phase two expanded the system with three new functions:

1. Allow citations to be added to the system prior to a court date. This enables the system to generate a court docket for a particular date range of citations. All citations are entered with an arraignment date, which provides the system with the ability to auto-generate a report of citations that have not been heard in court. This report is used as a docket for upcoming court dates. The report can be amended at any time while it is being created and courts can add new citations. Court clerks can print the docket for use in court, and later to enter the convictions to be sent to DPS.
2. Allow pages to auto-populate with existing data in the system. To enter convictions from the docket page, the court clerk enters the citation number, which pulls up all personal and vehicle information previously entered on the docket page and populates the conviction page; reducing the need to retype information.
3. Add ability to flag records as dismissed, preventing them from being transmitted to DPS as convictions.

Phase Three: (deployed in June, 2007)

The third phase expanded the system to include an action form, which gives users the ability to create and submit action forms for the suspension of licenses and for the withdrawal of suspension. It combines an electronic method of submitting the following notices to DPS:

The screenshot shows a web browser window displaying the 'Add Citations' form. The page header includes the Oklahoma state logo and the URL 'www.ok.gov'. The breadcrumb trail is 'Home > Main Menu > Municipal Court Reporting > Add Citations'. The form is titled 'Add Citations' and includes a note: '* Indicates Required Field'. The form fields are as follows: City County Code (0000), Citation Number (with a dropdown for 'Letter or Blank' and a text input for '(B, C, Initial)'), Last Name, First Name, Middle Name, Address, City, State (dropdown menu set to 'Oklahoma'), Zip Code, Birthdate (Format: mmddyyyy), Race (dropdown menu set to 'U - Not Known'), Sex (dropdown menu set to 'Male'), Driver License Number, Driver License State (dropdown menu set to 'Oklahoma'), Driver License Class (dropdown menu), Offense Date (Format: mmddyyyy), Select Violation (dropdown menu), Enter Violation Code (text input with '0' and a '-OR-' separator), Arraignment Date (Format: mmddyyyy), Fine: (without commas) (text input with '\$' symbol), Reappearance Date (Format: mmddyyyy), and a Comments text area.

- Failure to appear
- Failure to pay
- Failure to satisfy sentence of the court
- Notice of withdrawal of suspension
- Receipt of payment of fine and cost

Adoption of the Service

Once the online system became operational, DPS faced a barrier. Local municipalities were not accustomed to making changes, especially one that would move their familiar paper process online. The initial reaction was that they might lose their territory when conducting business with the state. This was defeated with good communication and promotional demonstrations of the program benefits.

In June of 2007, around 139 municipal courts were participating in the system with an adoption rate of 33%. Today, 236 municipal courts utilize the system, with a current adoption rate of 59%, an increase of 26% in one year. DPS averages around 6 new participants every month.

To promote the online service, two employees from DPS conduct trainings in different parts of the state, accommodating as many court clerks as possible. For 2008, there are 13 training classes scheduled. DPS employees also attend targeted conferences throughout the state to demonstrate the system for interested municipal courts. DPS has sent out two direct mailers explaining the benefits of the system, but attribute much of the system's adoption success to word of mouth efforts from court clerks themselves.

D. Significance to the Improvement of Government

Court Clerk Benefits

After visiting with several court clerks, DPS learned that their needs for additional services to compliment the system would be beneficial to both the municipality users and the state. The docket page implemented into the system is beneficial to court clerks because it provides them with an integrated information management tool to add all citations before the court date including municipal codes such as a barking dog or loud music. This is not sent to DPS, but is a permanent record for the court.

The system also provides the following benefits to court clerks:

- Ease of use compared to competing court reporting systems
- Free to municipalities who utilize the system
- Added security, privacy, and quickness compared to faxing sensitive information with the former paper process

State Agency Benefits

The built-in reporting tools and innovative features developed for error elimination has provided additional time and money savings for DPS. The system reduces paperwork, error ratios, and produces more efficient reporting associated with reporting convictions mandated by federal law. The program was built around the agency's policies, strategies and goals. Through the partnership with OK.gov, additional modifications and improvements can easily be made, as DPS continues to receive more input from users.

State Benefits

The system enables the state to service Oklahoma's municipal courts 24/7/365 in a much more secure environment. The cross-boundary collaborative system has improved the efficiency of court proceedings by providing clerks with an electronic means of conducting business, thus improving service delivery for all of Oklahoma.

Taxpayer Benefits

Oklahoma taxpayers benefit directly from the system because of the improvement of government operations, greater guarantee of accurate reporting on citizen convictions, and the allocation of saved funds and time to the improvement of other projects.

E. Benefit of the Project

The system provides new efficiencies and financial and non-financial returns on investment for DPS and Oklahoma's participating municipalities, which include:

- Efficient reporting and documentation for DPS and the courts
- Declining error ratios rates reported to DPS
- Reduced paperwork for the agency and the users
- Free to municipalities who utilize the system
- Free customer service and cost savings benefits

Efficient Reporting

All data can now be sent by the court clerks via this innovative service and can be accessed by the court clerk at any time. Clerks can now utilize a report and search utility within the system for increased reporting efficiency. The system can also be used as an automated mini traffic record within Oklahoma municipal courts.

Declining Error Ratios

There are several preventative features built into the system that are utilized when the court clerks are entering their information. If the information is not filled in correctly, the system alerts the user that errors have occurred, and the information is not sent to DPS until corrected. These compliance tracking features have cut the error ratio from 10 - 15%, down to 1 - 4%.

Reduced Paperwork

In the past, municipal court clerks sent piles of paperwork, which included a six-page form on each conviction to DPS. This one-stop solution removes much of the paperwork, allowing for a more efficient process of reporting convictions to DPS.

Free to Municipalities

There are approximately eight other municipal court reporting systems being used in the state of Oklahoma that are built by other private vendors and with a varying price range for the courts to use. These systems are software-based programs and are only available on the individual court clerks' computers. The Oklahoma Municipal Court Reporting System differs from its competitors because it is a free service to municipalities and available online 24/7. DPS has experienced approximately 20 instances where courts using another vendor switched to the Oklahoma Municipal Court Reporting system because of affordability and/or user-friendly issues.

Free Customer Service and Cost Savings

All OK.gov built Web applications come with the security of customer service at no cost to the agency. OK.gov customer service representatives answer phone calls and emails for the reporting system on a daily basis, usually answering questions about how to reset user passwords, when a court clerk has forgotten it.

DPS estimates an average savings of \$12,000 a year in printing, mailing, and shipping. In addition, DPS is now processing approximately 7,000 citations a month through the system, which allows for an estimated 100 employee hours saved. This provides approximately \$15,000 in savings each year in employee hours.

In the near future, the agency plans to build upon this system to obtain an entirely paperless process with the online service. Currently, DPS has one person who processes the paper municipal convictions, checking for errors and then forwards the convictions to others who scan the ticket and type the data onto the record through the Oklahoma Municipal Court Reporting System. When the system becomes mandatory, the person who is currently checking the paper copies for errors will be assigned other duties. Those manually entering data and scanning will also be assigned other duties, as convictions will already be completed electronically by the court clerks.

Phase Four: (Future Phase)

The objective of this phase is to expand the system to enable the courts to track a running total of payments to a particular citation, until the citation has been paid in full; providing a receipt to the payer upon receipt of payment.

End-to-end, the Oklahoma Municipal Court Reporting System operates with easy-to-use functionality resulting in an one-stop solution that provides money and time saving benefits for the state and municipal courts who are involved in this cross-boundary collaboration system in Oklahoma.