

**2008 NASCIO Recognition Awards Nomination
Commonwealth of Virginia**

Nomination Category:

Data, Information and Knowledge Management

Title of Nomination:

Commonwealth of Virginia Knowledge Center (COVKC)

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2008 Commonwealth of Virginia NASCIO Award Submission
Category: Data, Information and Knowledge Management
Project: Commonwealth of Virginia Knowledge Center (COVKC)

Executive Summary

The Commonwealth of Virginia is a leader in knowledge management. The Pew Center on the States rated Virginia the best managed state for the second consecutive year in the Government Performance Project Grading the States 2008 report. Specifically, the Commonwealth received top marks in “People,” which includes the Training and Development category. In addition, the Commonwealth received two national awards for Best Implementation of a product from Meridian Knowledge Solutions, LLC. What is Virginia doing in the training and development arena to receive such accolades?

In May 2004, eight Virginia agencies partnered to purchase the first Web-based, enterprise-wide knowledge management solution in the state, the **Commonwealth of Virginia Knowledge Center (COVKC)**. The system has grown to include more than 50 participating agencies, with more being added each quarter.

The COVKC provides the Commonwealth’s workforce with access to enterprise-wide training initiatives at the click of a mouse 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. The benefits of the COVKC are extensive. The COVKC strengths as an enterprise application are:

- More effective execution of government mandates, such the “Virginia Terrorism Awareness” training course mandated for all state employees.
- Quicker government responsiveness to change, such as policy update training.
- Reduction in redundancy and resources needed to implement initiatives.
- Increased program management and centralized reporting capabilities.

When government initiatives are created or updated, the Knowledge Center provides the platform for quickly and efficiently getting information to its workforce. Because information is created once and shared across the Commonwealth, the original message and intent of the training remains intact, making the training more effective. This knowledge management process is known as “domain sharing” and, according to the vendor, was pioneered by the Commonwealth. Each agency is assigned a domain (or portal) that is connected to the main COVKC domain. Agencies upload unique branding (graphics and login page text), add agency-specific content as appropriate and control which training and functions within the system are available to its users, while retaining the baseline functionality of the main COVKC domain.

Virginia has become the **first networked government for training**. Due to the success of the COVKC project, other government entities and even private corporations have adopted the same solution:

“As a result of the success at the Commonwealth of Virginia, Meridian has encouraged a number of other clients to learn from their efforts and uses them as a role model for the successful implementation of multiple domains.”

-- Elizabeth Harris, Principal, Meridian Knowledge Solutions, LLC.

Description of the problem and solution

Prior to 2003, each agency was responsible for procuring, learning, populating, supporting, and managing a system to house its training content. This resulted in many problems, including among others:

- Higher costs due to duplicated system licensing and maintenance fees and inability to leverage the Commonwealth's buying power – two agencies were paying full-price for the same system.
- Inability for agencies to easily share training content and resources.
- Duplicative training efforts for the same government mandate or initiative – each agency developed its own content.
- Inconsistent information from agency to agency on common subjects.
- Duplicative resources to develop and support an LMS – in some cases, agencies hired (or leveraged existing) programmers to develop a training database or system to house and track their training content

Training personnel across the Commonwealth met in 2003 to discuss the possibility of using one Learning Management System (LMS) for all state agencies; thereby, reducing the need of each agency to purchase a system and to resolve these issues. The LMS workgroup formed, and then further sub-divided into several project teams, to procure an enterprise-wide solution. Each team was made up of personnel from many agencies to ensure a holistic view of the Commonwealth was taken into consideration. Each team was assigned a team chair, who was responsible for the project management of the team, as well as reporting back to the Workgroup. The teams and their prime responsibilities were:

- The requirements team gathered LMS needs from agencies using surveys and focus groups, researched how to choose an LMS, and created white papers to keep agency heads informed.
- The procurement team drafted and released the request for proposals (RFP) to solicit potential LMS vendors.
- The systems team verified compliance, security, and system needs were addressed properly.
- The finance team researched and presented budget and finance options and performed research on average user licensing fees across the nation.
- The evaluation team reviewed proposals from LMS vendors, evaluated specific systems and products, and selected the LMS vendor with the best fit for the Commonwealth's needs.

The contract was awarded to Meridian Knowledge Solutions, LLC, and its Knowledge Center product on June 15, 2004. After selection of the COVKC, the Virginia Department of Human Resource Management (DHRM) was designated as the business owner and the DHRM chief information officer was tasked with its implementation. Eight leading agencies formed the LMS steering committee, which drove the implementation and became the system experts. The steering committee established preliminary business rules for the system, identified system areas for customization to meet specific agency needs not covered in the base product (for example, system designs for a lodging console were developed to accommodate an agency that provides

housing for its “academy” students), and drafted an implementation guide. Following an aggressive schedule, three of the original core agencies went live on March 1, 2005.

Today, the steering committee continues to provide vital assistance with the COVKC by reviewing enhancement requests to determine their needs across the Commonwealth, creating best practice documents, establishing business rules for the system, and testing any new functionality.

Participation in the COVKC has grown exponentially since the first agency went live in 2005. As of April 2008, more than 40 agencies are now using the system to house their training content and documentation. Specifically, since 2006, the COVKC has noticed a steady increase in the number of agencies interested in benefiting from the system. This is due, in part, to Virginia Governor Tim Kaine’s emphasis on training and technology advancements across the state. The COVKC combines the best of both of these worlds in an easy-to-use, cost-effective solution.

Testament to the effectiveness of the COVKC solution is the number of users that have registered to use the system. In January 2006, the number of registered users was just under 50,000. Today, the number of registered users has jumped to over 121,000.

Significance of the project to the improvement of the operation of government

“Virginia Leading the Way” is the motto of Governor Kaine’s Administration, adopted because it embodies both Virginia’s tradition of excellence and its constant striving to surpass previous achievements. The COVKC has transformed the way the Commonwealth approaches and releases its training solutions. Also in line with the Governor’s initiative of enterprise solutions, the COVKC makes government more efficient and effective by reducing agency operating costs and advancing the core mission of the Commonwealth’s agencies. In addition, agencies using the COVKC now have a tool to streamline the process of collecting training and knowledge management metrics for inclusion in the Governor’s Management Scorecard, such as the number of training hours provided to state employees. This information is easily tracked, gathered, and reported out using the COVKC.

Not only has the COVKC improved training solutions for the Commonwealth, but also for local and federal governments, businesses, higher education institutions, and its citizens. Originally intended for state employees, the COVKC quickly grew to accommodate other entities (both in the public and private sectors). For example, the Virginia Department of Taxation provides extensive online training for its local Commissioners of the Revenue, Treasurers, and various set-off agencies across the state. This training includes annual legislative updates, detailed systems training, and policies and procedures training. In order to meet these needs, the COVKC was enhanced to allow for “non-state” registrations. Because some organizations have training needs among multiple state agencies (like the Virginia Department of Social Services), the system allows the non-state user to register in the system once and access multiple agency domains using the same login ID and password. In other words, the COVKC is a one-stop shop for all Commonwealth training needs.

The COVKC solution supports the following business objectives:

- Workforce continuity - Commonwealth succession planning, cross training, and knowledge transfer, which is particularly important with a significant portion of the state workforce reaching retirement eligibility.
- Knowledge management - Facilitates the development and implementation of enterprise knowledge management programs while allowing agencies to incorporate agency-specific content, courses and books in their domains.
- Records management - Eliminates duplicative databases for training records and transcripts across the Commonwealth and provides the mechanism for agencies to store historical training data maintained previously on paper or outdated systems.
- Accessibility - Supports Section 508 of the Americans with Disability Act for disabled users.
- Efficiency and effectiveness - Improves efficiency by leveraging best practices incorporated in today's leading LMS software, leveraging the Commonwealth's spending power, and improving the ability to roll out statewide training and education components and initiatives.
- Collaboration - Promotes inter-agency sharing of training best practices and course materials.
- Agility and flexibility - Provides the flexibility needed to maintain and meet ever-changing business and employee educational and development needs.
- Continuous learning - Expands access to learning for employees and citizens.

Benefits of the project

Because the COVKC is the Commonwealth's enterprise-wide knowledge management system, many benefits are passed automatically to agencies. Specifically, the COVKC:

- Allows for the sharing of published courses across state agencies and even non-state entities, thus reducing duplicative training content development and purchases.
- Expedites the process of statewide training initiatives, including courses on terrorism awareness, cyber security awareness, employee grievance procedure, worker's compensation, and Managing Virginia Program courses, which were uploaded to the COVKC and immediately made available to all state employees.
- Reduces statewide costs for LMS products and annual service fees, previously maintained and paid for separately by agencies.
- Provides for the sharing of system expertise and experience among the network of Knowledge Center administrators.
- Integrates with the Commonwealth's human resource management systems to provide automatic updates of user profile information. Users simply authenticate themselves and create unique login information to register in and use the system.
- Allows for training metrics to be gathered for any state agency at the click of a mouse. Since training information is being tracked and stored in one central database, the process for pulling reports and gathering program results is simplified.

- Provides a centralized location for storing state employee training records. When employees move from one state agency to another, their official COVKC training transcripts remain intact and move with them to the new agency. This allows users to have a comprehensive record of all training completed while in state employment.

The Commonwealth's investment in the COVKC project has provided a strong financial return on investment. While a comprehensive return on investment analysis has not yet occurred, preliminary data shows considerable monetary savings. For example, one large agency realized \$139,000 savings per year in the reduction of its hosting fees and \$725,000 per year in the reduction of 5 contracted positions with a previous LMS vendor – a total annual savings of nearly \$865,000. Additionally, two smaller agencies realized more than \$17,000 in savings per year due to the reduction in its hosting fees for another LMS. Since most agencies were not using an LMS, their financial return on investment comes primarily from the reduction of costs associated with instructor- and classroom-based training, including travel, materials, facility fees, and course and instructor fees.

The Commonwealth of Virginia's Knowledge Center is a robust, enterprise-wide solution that pioneered the way government agencies and even private corporations deliver training to their user populations. Under the Governor's direction, the Commonwealth continues to leverage and expand the COVKC to deliver value and efficiency to agencies and non-state organizations. The future looks even brighter as the Commonwealth examines developing the system for e-Commerce and online performance evaluations.