

2009 NASCIO Recognition Awards Nomination Commonwealth of Kentucky

Nomination Category:

Digital Government: Government to Government (G to G)

Title of Nomination:

Kentucky Department of Public Health - WebEOC

Nomination Submitted By:

Kentucky's Commonwealth Office of Technology

2009 NASCIO Recognition Awards
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Kentucky Department of Public Health – WebEOC
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Executive Summary

In the Spring of 2007, the Kentucky Department for Public Health (KDPH) implemented the WebEOC project in response to The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) guidance that stipulated that public health departments shall implement a system to enhance the capability to support response operations in accordance with the National Incident Management System (NIMS) and the National Response Framework (NRF).

WebEOC is a web-based critical incident management system that, allows for information to flow from various incident response roles to others which increases the availability of knowledge about the situation. The WebEOC project addresses Kentucky's need to ensure that the KDPH Department Operations Center (DOC) meets NIMS incident command structure requirements to perform core functions such as coordination, communications, resource dispatch, tracking and information collection, analysis, and dissemination

Though originally intended to bring together information to a collaborative platform in the KDPH DOC, the flexibility of the WebEOC system has allowed the partnering with the Kentucky Division of Emergency Management (KYEM) to make the system available to the State Emergency Operations Center (SEOC) and 120 County Emergency Operations Centers

Since February 2008, WebEOC has been utilized by Kentucky's SEOC during all full scale activations. Incident responses ranging from severe weather and white power scares to ruptured natural resource pipelines and school bus collisions have been coordinated and managed better through the use of WebEOC.

There really isn't a way to measure a financial return on the WebEOC investment. The value of this project far outweighs the modest cost in turning a grant action item into a reality that can be used to manage real incidents that in some cases can cost real lives. The necessity for timely delivery of incident activity from one response agency to another boils down to that agency ensuring the safety of it's personnel and the delivery of essential services.

Emergencies happen. Left alone they can grow in scale ultimately intensifying into a disaster. Properly managed, the emergency is mitigated. Lives and property are saved. Kentucky agencies are using WebEOC to effectively work together and manage emergencies to prevent disaster

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Description

In the Spring of 2007, the Kentucky Department for Public Health (KDPH) implemented the WebEOC project in response to The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) guidance that stipulated that public health departments shall implement a system to enhance the capability to support response operations in accordance with the National Incident Management System (NIMS) and the National Response Framework (NRF).

WebEOC is a web-based critical incident management system. Systems of this type and WebEOC in particular, allow for information to flow from various incident response roles to others which increases the availability of knowledge about the situation. This collaboration between roles and disciplines is absolutely critical to the successful management of an incident. The uniqueness of the WebEOC application to work from one agency to another means that KDPH was able to take an off the shelf product and tailor it to meet the needs of our agency, moving information around the way everyone is accustomed to working in the DOC.

Although many local health departments (LHD) are very capable of incident command and coordination of their response, there remained a need to standardize, validate, and support statewide local planning and response strategies and structures. The implementation of the WebEOC project has directly supported CDC preparedness goals for coordinating the responses to control the threats to public health.

The WebEOC project addresses Kentucky's need to ensure that the KDPH Department Operations Center (DOC) meets NIMS incident command structure requirements to perform core functions such as coordination, communications, resource dispatch, tracking and information collection, analysis, and dissemination. The project has increased the use and development of interventions that will support the state's response to chemical, biological, radiological, and naturally occurring threats to the public's health.

A partnership with the University of Louisville's Information Technology Research Center (now closed due to University restructuring) involved shadowing KDPH during a full scale Strategic National Stockpile exercise, and during significant events around the Kentucky Derby Festival. Their shadowing demonstrated the underlying need for KDPH to have a standardized incident management platform for different public health personnel to document incident activity and use the

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information to make critical decisions.

Significance to the Improvement of Government

Soon after taking delivery of the WebEOC application and as process implementation developed, it became apparent that KDPH was unaware of some response guidelines that are considered daily business to more traditional response agencies. Given the flexibility of the software, the decision was made to partner with the Kentucky Division of Emergency Management (KYEM) to help guide and refine the automated process in WebEOC. In short, KYEM gained access to a critical incident management software for use in the State Emergency Operations Center (SEOC) in return for testing the processes developed based on the proprietary needs of agencies in Kentucky.

Though originally intended to bring together information to a collaborative platform in the KDPH DOC, WebEOC has truly been a project that brings agencies of varied disciplines together during emergencies. The difference this project has made in the way Kentucky responds as a state is not measurable. The documentation of incident details alone is priceless. Savings to the state is measured in lives saved and situations mitigated, not dollars. Most importantly the WebEOC project has caused agencies to build bridges and work together as public servants should.

Upon consultation with planning and operations staff from the Kentucky Division of Emergency Management (KYEM), KDPH determined they project needed input from parties more familiar with the emergency management process. The decision was made to partner with KYEM with the intent that their subject matter expertise about incident response would make WebEOC a better project overall for the public health community. In return for their input to the process flow, KYEM was given access to the application for use in the State's Emergency Operations Center (SEOC) for use during real events by the agencies that represent all the functions in an EOC. The interesting part about the partnership between agencies is that a formal memorandum of understanding was never signed, keeping the traditional red tape barriers from stalling the project.

KYEM, having no existing incident management system to use during activations, quickly took to the WebEOC software. They saw the cost-savings of not having to buy their own system and valued that their input was molding a product to do business the way it is intended to happen. On February 5th, 2008, KYEM operations staff, faced with a historically devastating line of severe

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thunderstorms marching across the state, made the call to use WebEOC to manage the incident. WebEOC was rolled out in the SEOC as the event unfolded: Users were given a 10-15 minute just in time training in the software, leadership was able to make decisions based on the intelligence being collected from the various public safety disciplines and utility regulatory authorities. Ultimately the storms produced a number of tornadoes and killed seven Kentuckians. Nearly 50 responders representing over a dozen agencies in the SEOC walked in having never heard of WebEOC then walked out amazed at what a tested and methodically developed incident management platform could do to enhance their own ability to respond and recover. Each user was able to view information being contributed by the different disciplines, where their own view may have been lacking, and this filled a void allowing them to command resources, manage response teams, and operate in an environment somewhat out of their element.

Benefit of the Project

An unforeseen benefit of WebEOC is that the flexibility of the software is allowing Kentucky to make the system available to 120 County Emergency Operations Centers. Since local EOC's operate based on the needs of the community, the software will revolve around positions instead of users. The position concept affords maximum flexibility and allows the software to work in the smallest EOC of 5 users all the way to the largest metropolitan EOC of 50+ users. In addition to the local management aspect of the software, the same collaboration concept allows a local EOC manager to submit significant and critical information directly to the SEOC without ever dialing a number on a telephone or facsimile machine.

WebEOC was put to test the first time during a tornado outbreak in February 2008. The system was implemented as severe weather passed over Kentucky. Users representing agencies such as the National Guard, Transportation, State Police, even Environmental Protection had never heard tale of WebEOC or what it could do. The average learning curve for users was less than ten minutes. They were excited to have a system available that worked well. Ever since this event, WebEOC has been used during each subsequent full scale activation of the SEOC and each time ways have been found to improve the system based on user feedback.

Since the February 2008 storms, WebEOC has been utilized by Kentucky's SEOC during all full scale activations. Incident responses ranging from severe weather and white power scares to ruptured natural resource pipelines and

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school bus collisions have been coordinated and managed better through the use of WebEOC. After each of these incidents, user input is taken back to make their experience in the software better. The result is a product that users are accustomed to logging on as they take their seat and prepare to respond. (Chart 1 indicates agencies with access to WebEOC).

There really isn't a way to measure a financial return on the WebEOC investment. The value of this project far outweighs the modest cost in turning a grant action item into a reality that can be used to manage real incidents that in some cases can cost real lives.

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Chart 1 – Agency Representation for each Emergency Support Function staffed at the Kentucky State Emergency Operations Center, each with full access to WebEOC.

ESF-1 Transportation

Kentucky Transportation Cabinet

ESF-9 Search & Rescue

Kentucky Emergency Management

ESF-2 Communications

Kentucky National Guard
Commonwealth Office of Technology

ESF-10 Oil, Gas, HazMat

Energy & Environment Cabinet
Department for Public Health
Kentucky Fire Marshal

ESF-4 Firefighting

Kentucky Fire Marshal
Kentucky Fire Commission

ESF-11 Agriculture & Natural Resources

Department of Agriculture

ESF-5 Emergency Management

Kentucky Emergency Management

ESF-12 Energy

Public Service Commission

ESF-6 Mass Care & Housing

American Red Cross
Salvation Army

ESF-13 Public Safety & Security

Kentucky State Police
Kentucky Fire Marshal
Kentucky Department of Fish & Wildlife
Kentucky Office of Homeland Security

ESF-7 Resource Support

Kentucky National Guard
Kentucky Emergency Management

ESF-14 Long Term Recovery

Kentucky Emergency Management

ESF-8 Health & Medical

Department for Public Health
Board of Emergency Medical Services
Kentucky Hospital Association
Kentucky Pharmacists Association

ESF-15 External Affairs

Governor's Office
Kentucky Emergency Management
Kentucky National Guard