
UTAH PUBLIC MEETING NOTICE

Digital Government: Government to Citizen (G to C)

State of Utah

B. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Public Meeting Notice (PMN) Website (<http://www.utah.gov/pmn/index.html>) was developed to increase government-meeting transparency in Utah. Prior to the website's development, government entities statewide posted meetings and bond hearing notices on individual websites, in newspaper outlets, and on public viewing boards. With information spread across various platforms, meetings and notices were difficult to access and attend. The partners of this project collaborated and created an innovative web-based application that became the nation's first public meeting website to be fully integrated at the state and local level. It is also the first to mandate government participation through legislation. The PMN Website reaches across state and local government levels to provide the citizens of Utah a single, online location where information regarding all meeting and bond hearing notices can be easily obtained. Centralizing this information greatly simplifies citizen's ability to stay informed on matters of local and state government.

The new site increases transparency by enabling Utahns to search, subscribe, and participate in government meetings throughout the state. Citizens may search by keyword or government organization to find public meetings. Alternatively, citizens may browse all the meetings in their city or county. Once citizens have found a government organization of interest, they may subscribe to receive notifications regarding meetings via RSS feed and/or email. Notifications are sent to subscribers when new notices are published, updated or cancelled. Visitors can access the details associated with both past and upcoming public meetings, including the address, date, time, and agenda.

The objective of the Utah Public Meeting Notice Website is to dramatically improve the transparency, accessibility, and efficiency of meeting and bond hearing notices for citizens in the state of Utah. Officially launched on October 1, 2008, PMN has already centralized the notice information for 875 various government entities statewide. Prior to the creation of PMN, each of these entities published their public notices on their own website or the notices were not available online. Of those 875 state, county, city, school district, and special district entities, over 2,001 public bodies have already registered and are able to publish notices for public search.

PMN consists of two main online modules: A public site which provides Utah citizens the ability to view meeting and bond hearing notice details and an administrative site which allows public body administrators to draft, post, edit, or cancel notices for the viewing public. These two main modules utilize a variety of innovative features to provide citizens with the ability to stay apprised and involved in both local and state government activities.

The Public Meeting Notice Website simplifies and centralizes the information into a single, online location. The project incorporates innovative technology, eliminates the paper process, saves time and money, and is managed by a state employee. Citizens can more easily engage in government meetings, thereby increasing government transparency.

C. DESCRIPTION OF THE BUSINESS PROBLEM

In Utah, public meetings and bond hearing notices are difficult to access and attend. Various government entities post notices on numerous platforms, leaving a maze of confusion about how this information is displayed statewide. The overall process is inconsistent, unorganized, ineffective and costly.

This problem presented five major challenges to overcome:

- Centralizing information spread across numerous platforms – Various government entities post meetings and bond hearing notices on individual websites, in newspaper outlets, and on public viewing boards.
- Training a vast number of personnel – Initiating a massive training program to more than 1,500 state, county, city, school district, and special service personnel.
- Solidifying legislative support – Getting all government entities to use the same process is a major hurdle.
- Developing a project and transforming the paper process – Implementing an innovative process that saves government time and money.
- Implementing the best integrator – Utilizing the best process to ensure a resourceful solution.

To meet these challenges, seven main objectives were established to implement a solution:

- Define project requirements with specified budget
- Centralize meeting notices in one location
- Integration across government organizational boundaries
- Implement a massive training program
- Mandate participation through legislative involvement
- Implement the system fully integrated on a state and local level
- Transform the previous paper process into a fully electronic process

With the opportunity to create an integrated solution for the process, government stakeholders collaboratively determined that a web-based application, fully integrated on a state and local level would be the perfect fit.

The Utah State Legislature passed UCS 63F-1-701 in the 2007 General Session enabling the creation of the Utah Public Meeting Notice (PMN) Website to assist the public to find, search, and subscribe to posted public notices of any public body in the state.

Once legislation was passed, the partners of this project collaborated and created the nation's first PMN Website to be fully integrated at the state and local level with mandated participation. The site provides the citizens of Utah a single, online location

where information regarding all meeting and bond hearing notices can be easily obtained.

Utah's PMN dramatically improves transparency, accessibility, and efficiency of meeting and bond hearing notices for citizens in the state of Utah. The new site enables Utahns to search, subscribe, and participate in government meeting throughout the state. Citizens can subscribe to receive notifications on notices for public bodies and can choose to receive them via RSS feed and/or email.

The project incorporates innovative technology, transforms the previous paper process into a fully electronic process, saves time and money, and is managed by a state employee. Citizens can more easily engage in government meetings, thereby increasing government transparency.

Solution Description

PMN is a Website located at (<http://www.utah.gov/pmnlindex.html>) and consists of two main online modules: A public site which provides Utah citizens the ability to view meeting and bond hearing notice details and an administrative site which allows public body administrators to draft, post, edit, or cancel notices for the viewing public. These two main modules utilize a variety of innovative technologies that were incorporated in the PMN to facilitate better communication with the public:

- Open Source Application Server – PMN was implemented using GlassFish as the application server platform.
- List Serv – Software to manage the countless email lists was utilized. These email lists are generated automatically whenever a new public body is created and citizens can select to join a list and receive notifications for specific public bodies when a meeting is added or updated.
- Directory Integration – PMN is integrated with the Utah Master Directory which included all State employees and local government PMN users.
- RSS – Web feeds of public meetings are created allowing citizens to customize a subscription to meeting information related to their interests.
- Web Service – Used to automate the entry and modification of public notices for entities that already had their own public notification system.
- Site Mapping –Facilitates the ability of published notices to be picked up by search engines such as Google and thereby provide citizens with another avenue to locate notices and get involved.
- Widgets – Employed to ease the automatic posting of meeting notices on individual Web site, and further disseminate accurate meeting information.

The PMN is managed and maintained by State employees. The PMN site was given a complete security review and analysis prior to deployment. PMN is deployed in an open source application server and database environment.

Length of Time in Operation

The PMN application went through necessary phases to develop the complete centralized Web site. The project began in March 2007, was fully deployed on April 1, 2008, and government entities were mandated to participate on October 1, 2008.

PMN Timeline

- March 2007: Charter Phase
- April 2007: Requirements and Design Phase
- April – October 2007: Construction Phase
- September 2007– February 2008 - Utah Interactive Internal Testing Phase
- January – February 2008: Administrator Phase
- March – April 2008: Utah State Archives & Technology Services Testing Phase
- April – September 2008: Implementation/Production Phase
- October 2008: Version 2 Release and Mandatory Participation
- September 2008: PMN Web Service
- June 2009: PMN Widgets

D. SIGNIFICANCE TO THE IMPROVEMENT OF THE OPERATION OF GOVERNMENT

Posting meetings in a central location is an entirely new practice. The PMN administrative site provides administrative users with the ability to enter and edit meeting and bond notification information. Rather than alerting newspapers separately, administrators may automatically email notifications to newspapers of their choice, allowing newspaper outlets to choose whether they publish the meeting information. Updates and posting notices occur in real time compared to the lengthy process of printing and posting notifications in various locations.

The Public Meeting Notice program transforms the previous paper process into a fully electronic process and has proven to be an efficient web-based application with many positive outcomes:

- Centralization – PMN has already centralized the notice information for 875 government entities Utah wide. Over 2,001 public bodies within those state, county, city, school district, and special service district entities have already registered and are able to publish notices for public search.
- Ease of use – PMN provides administrative users with the ability to send meeting and bond notifications to 70 newspapers located across Utah. There are 2,458 administrative users posting and maintaining notices, an average of 1,487

notices are posted monthly, with 40,870 total citizen visitors in 2008, and many more expected in 2009.

- Improves productivity – While the productivity of all government entities involved has increased anecdotally because only PMN needs to be updated, the Division of Archives can boast that only one state employee is needed to manage the PMN program.
- Improves transparency – All government meeting information in Utah is now publicly accessible in the most ubiquitous location possible, the Internet.
- Saves government money – The PMN program saves a significant amount of money by providing a free alternative to posting notices in local newspapers. According to calculated estimates, the program saves state and local governments \$588,852 annually simply by eliminating the fee to post notices in newspapers. The estimated cost of posting a meeting notice is \$33 per post, per day. The cost was calculated by estimating a conservative 12 lines per meeting post. With 1,487 meeting notices posted monthly, the cost equates to \$49,071 per month. Additionally, each public body saves on paper costs -- with the new site, there is no need for posting meeting notices on public viewing boards.
- Saves paper – The new process transforms the previous paper process into a fully electronic process, thus eliminating the need for paper. With 1,487 monthly meeting notices previously posted in a paper format in multiple locations, the innovative process is saving time, money, and countless amounts of paper.

E. BENEFIT OF THE PROJECT

The PMN has been beneficial for government and also for the citizens of Utah. The program saves government time and money, improves productivity, improves transparency, eliminates the need to use paper, and centralizes the location for meeting notices. Most importantly it drastically improves the process and allows citizens to more easily engage in government meetings.

The PMN has improved productivity and saved government money but the overall success of the program, however, is being measured by its utilization:

- a. The productivity of all government entities involved has increased anecdotally because only PMN needs to be updated and the Division of Archives administers the site and the PMN program with a state employee.
- b. The overall success of the program is being measured by its utilization:
 - 875 government entities
 - 2,001 public bodies posting notices

- 17,844* notices posted annually

*Figure(s) extrapolated using the current data available

- c. Citizen access and acceptance is a major measurement factor: A recent survey was created and distributed to citizens and State agencies utilizing PMN. All the feedback received was very positive; here are a few quotes from the survey:

"The Utah Public Notice Website is an innovative, one-stop site delivering citizens with instant access to information about public meetings throughout the state. It is another resource for providing the public with greater transparency into government activities." John

"It's fast and easy to use! Everyone is following the same process, using the same format and the public can access as many as needed in one location." Angie

"The Utah Public Notice Website provides easy access to upcoming public meeting information and preserves these records of public meetings. The website is a valuable public service, providing essential public records on state and community levels of history and government accountability." Tricia

"I like the web site. It is easy and a great way to communicate public meetings. No problems or drawbacks that I can see." Melanie

The PMN Web site demonstrates four unique contributions:

- First of its kind in the nation – First state to implement a centralized public meeting program that increases transparency enabling Utahns to search, subscribe, and participate in government meetings.
- Cross Government Boundary Integration – With all state agencies involved along with local government, schools, and special districts, it acts as a central source for all public meeting information statewide with a standardized format for publishing.
- Transparency – All government meeting information in Utah is now publicly accessible in the most ubiquitous location possible, the Internet.
- Legislative Involvement – Because of legislation mandating utilization of PMN, it becomes the standard method for finding a public meeting and the public can locate meeting notices in a single website.