



Commonwealth of Kentucky

2010 NASCIO Recognition Awards Nomination
Category: Open Government initiatives

Kentucky Open Door Website

Submitted by: Commonwealth Office of Technology



Executive Summary

Kentucky's *Open Door* website (www.OpenDoor.ky.gov) is a "one-stop" portal for statewide transparency and accountability. The site began as a bi-partisan cooperative effort among the executive branch and all state constitutional officers in January of 2009. In November of 2009, recognizing the success of *Open Door* Kentucky's Judicial Branch joined our existing efforts in providing expenditure and contract records. The *Open Door* website is the only transparency website for state budget spending which includes transparency for executive and judicial branches, as well as all constitutional officers, in a single portal. Kentucky's *Open Door* is being recognized throughout all branches of government, and is gaining widespread acceptance with taxpayers who are increasingly becoming aware of this valuable resource.

A recent study by the US Public Interest Research Group (USPIRG), a long-standing federation of independent public advocacy and consumer protection groups, recently gave Kentucky's *Open Door* site the only "A" with a 97% ranking overall in a national study. The study, "Following the Money: How the 50 States Rate in Providing Online Access to Government Spending Data" measured states' progress toward "Transparency 2.0" – a new standard of comprehensive, one-stop, one-click budget accountability and accessibility. Similarly, the blog "Show Me the Spending," part of the Sunshine Review, lists Kentucky's *Open Door* website alongside only one other state (Missouri) which provides across the board access to a wide breadth of information on state spending (http://sunshinereview.org/index.php/States_with_spending_online). *Open Door* provides detailed access to budget, tax credit, revenue, and expenditure information; there is a searchable database of line item expenditures and contracts, with pdf. copies of current contracts; a search is provided for state employee salary information; and, there are extensive links to audits, American Recovery and Reinvestment Act information (Kentucky at Work), tax incentive information, unclaimed property, election finance, executive branch ethics and much more. Records on the site are refreshed frequently, all expenditure and contract records are updated twice daily, and salary data bi-monthly; in total the site hosts over four million records extending over three fiscal years. The site layout and design are driven by user feedback, improvements are based on national standards and "contact us" items, the site also employs social networking through Facebook and Twitter for site users to stay connected. *Open Door* provides an unprecedented level of transparency and accountability; since its inception the site has been a cooperative effort which relied on existing staff and resources, without any additional appropriations or assistance.

The benefits of *Open Door* have been substantial. The site has created administrative efficiencies for public information requests, improved financial reporting, and provided significant savings for the development of the state stimulus website (www.kentuckyatwork.ky.gov- another trendsetter in transparency, currently just behind Maryland (85 to 87) in the most recent ranking by Good Jobs First in their report "*Show Us the Stimulus (Again)*"). Most importantly, advancements in transparency allow for increased civic participation, increased trust, and more responsiveness and fiscal responsibility in Government, which benefits all Kentuckians.

Description

- Since taking office Governor Steven Beshear has advocated a more ethical, transparent, and accountable state government. Shortly after taking office, in the spring of 2008, Governor Beshear issued an executive order establishing the E-Transparency Task Force, a 17 member, bipartisan panel committed to providing a more transparent, accountable state government that helps eliminate wasteful spending, encourages civic participation, and improves the public trust. The task force was charged with providing recommendations on a one-stop clearinghouse for transparency in state finances, which is easily accessible by the general public. The *Open Door* website is an outgrowth of that commitment, and the direct product of the E-Transparency Task Force. *Open Door* was launched on January 1st of 2009.
- The E-Transparency Task Force, was chaired by Finance and Administration Cabinet Secretary Jonathan Miller, and co-chaired by State Auditor Crit Luallen, and State Treasurer Todd Hollenbach. The task force included state leaders, and representatives from numerous public advocacy groups. The task force was charged with submitting a report to the Governor by November 1st 2008. That final report constituted testimony from throughout the spring and summer on best practices in transparency, and a number of recommendations from the public. In keeping with the spirit of transparency all public proceedings from the group were published online (<http://www.finance.ky.gov/etrans.htm>) and public input was sought early on in allowing citizens to review mock-ups of the *Open Door* site from November-January and provide feedback on design and features they thought should be included.
- Since launching in January the site continues to be driven by user feedback and national practices. The site began with extensive budget information and an expenditure search, and has since grown to include a contract search, state salary search, and improvements are underway at the present time to produce a state property search and expand financial literacy tools.
- *Site Management and Maintenance-* *Open Door* is managed and maintained by Kentucky's Finance and Administration Cabinet, site design is provided by ky.gov through an existing contract with the Commonwealth, maintenance and storage is provided by the Commonwealth Office of Technology. The State Controller's Office and Finance Office of Administrative Services, review the information for accuracy and completeness. The site is managed through existing staff and resources without outside appropriations. Status meetings are held periodically to update the plan and timeline. At any one time involvement rarely exceeds five employees, with two-three employees as the norm. It is estimated that by handling operations in-house and through website administrators Kentucky was able to save upwards of approximately \$100,000. The only recurring costs are minimal and relate to the storage space of site records, these are approximately \$10,000 annually and are mitigated by using existing server space.

- *Communications*- The initial E-Transparency Task Force was created by Governor Beshear and promoted by the Finance and Administration Cabinet. The task force included press advocates and organizations and so had a degree of built-in promotion. Subsequent promotion of *Open Door* was managed by the Finance and Administration Cabinet. Public input was sought for design and functionality; citizens could submit suggestions and ask for various features to be included. *Open Door* has used webinars to communicate to the public and press, and makes tutorial videos available on the site. Additionally, state agencies are encouraged to provide links to the site. A large degree of site promotion is a result from a number of national independent reviews which help promote the site (e.g. USPIRG, see Executive Summary). Also, via the “contact us” features several states have requested help on their sites- such free exchange is always beneficial and serves to increase the national discussion on transparency which benefits everyone. Finally, numerous speaking engagements to public procurement and administrative officials at state and local levels ensure that site improvements not only provide transparency, but increase efficacy and utility for government services.
- *Solutions Architecture*- *Open Door* is built on Microsoft Technologies utilizing SharePoint Server 2007 for its front-end architecture. The search components included on the site were built from the ground up using the .NET framework, and connect remotely to data provided by the Finance Cabinet of the Commonwealth. Other areas on the site include custom webparts leveraging SharePoint controls, and the JQuery library for their integrated functionality.
- Protection of the financial data on Open Door begins before any information appears on the site. Prior to the site’s launch correspondence was sent to all agencies using eMARS (statewide accounting) to request information on what expenditures are confidential and therefore exempt from the open records statutes. Agencies responded with funds and/or object codes that needed to be excluded from the search. Some examples are the benefit expenditures sent to individuals such as unemployment insurance or Aid to Dependent Children payments. The transactions listed by the agencies were excluded from the query and are not included in the information that is available to KY Interactive for the search. The plan is prior to new searches going live, information will be sent to the general counsels of the agencies to determine if any of the information is exempt from the open records statutes.

Significance

- The significance of *Open Door* and transparency in general has been amplified by the severity of the national economic slowdown, and within Kentucky by a series of budget reductions due to fiscal imbalances. Kentucky faces double digit unemployment, a shrinking economic base, as well as negative poverty and education indicators. After a series of budget reductions, state services which are dependent on taxes and other state revenues are jeopardized. It is inescapable that the current crises both statewide and nationally feed the growing interest in fiscal transparency and efficacy in state government.

- Beneficiaries of transparency include all taxpayers and businesses from an information and civic engagement prospective. Vendors looking to do business with the Commonwealth also benefit from increased openness on opportunities and existing contracts. Government service providers both at state and local levels benefit from sharing of information, and the ability to realize existing contract opportunities, or efficiencies that can be gained at an enterprise level.
- The creation of *Open Door* fulfilled Governor Beshear's specific policy objective to create an easily accessible portal for the general public to access state financial information. *Open Door* has also supported a number of indirect public policy goals by assisting procurement and accuracy in financial reporting. *Open Door* provides a communication, and public outreach tool which supports sister initiatives like Governor Beshear's Smart Government Initiative- which is tasked with finding and implementing efficiencies throughout government (see Section E- Benefits).

Benefit

- The goal, and ultimate benefit, of the *Open Door* has always been to provide an unprecedented amount of transparency to Kentuckians. Project objectives were to provide an easily accessible platform, where citizens can find detailed information on government spending. The aims of *Open Door* have been to increase civic participation, promote trust, and engender more responsiveness and ensure high levels of fiscal responsibility in Government.
- The costs to produce and maintain the site are substantially lower than were originally estimated; because development, storage, and maintenance of the site are handled in-house there are no additional costs to taxpayers for the site. The ability to provide access to information, and to do so in a user friendly and cost effective way is a major benefit to taxpayers. Cost avoidance by in house development is estimated to be upwards of \$100,000 on *Open Door*, and another \$100,000 or more in the development of the state stimulus website- which uses much of the same programming.
- Additionally, a number of additional positive externalities have been realized since the information came online. Both local and state agencies seeking to make purchases off existing contracts can locate the information easier, and outside requests for contract information can now be referred to the online resource. There are plans in the immediate future to refine the contract search to make it even more user-friendly and to include a look-up by contract number; these changes should reduce administrative costs associated with information requests.
- Qualitative benefits have emerged in the areas of financial reporting and processing. A direct result of increased transparency both in the areas of accounting and contracting has led to changes in business processes which reduce errors and ensure complete record keeping. Previously, digital copies of contracts varied

across services being procured. Since posting pdf. copies of contracts online, record keeping has improved and administrative burdens have been reduced.

- Benefits from posting detailed contract information online are anticipated, but are also more difficult to measure, several states with transparency sites (e.g. Massachusetts) report that transparency on existing contracts help ensure government procurement officials receive more favorable bids- saving substantial sums in contract negotiations and renewals, avoiding duplication, and ease of identifying greater cost efficiencies.
- Lastly, by providing access to government spending information Kentucky has created a platform for wider goals of the Administration in finding spending efficiencies through Governor Beshear's Smart Government Initiative. The Smart Government Initiative (SGI) is a multi-agency effort to find efficiencies in government operations; *Open Door* provides for citizen and employee input on cost-efficiency measures and aids SGI progress by making information easy to access.