Electronic Death Registration
and
Birth Certificates on Demand

CATEGORY: Digital Government - Government to Citizen

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Executive Summary

Two projects in Virginia have enhanced the government-to-citizen experience in obtaining two vital records. These important government services often required immediacy but had limited availability to the citizens of Virginia. Now, services are immediately available, paperwork has been nearly eliminated, errors reduced and staff time saved.

The first, the Virginia Department of Health's (VDH's) [Electronic Death Registration System (EDRS)](), enables participants in the death registration process to file death records online with VDH vital records.

In the second project, VDH joined with the Virginia Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV) to permit citizens to obtain same-day [birth certificates]() at nearly 80 DMV customer services centers across the commonwealth.

The EDRS is a secure, completely Web-based tool that allows the decedent's information to be collected and validated online. Currently, there are more than 4,000 users of the EDRS, both inside VDS and throughout Virginia.

VDH and DMV collaborated on the second project. Staff at the two state agencies designed, developed and implemented the transactions utilizing a secure Web service with associated XML schemas to support the issuance of birth certificates at the DMV customer service centers. The secure Web service enables a critical, real-time data exchange between DMV and VDH.

EDRS created the option of a paperless system in recording a death.

Approximately 130,000 birth certificates have issued the same day as requested in the 14 months since implementation.

Through VDH's individual project, and through its joint efforts with DMV, the state has created distributed service models that generate revenue, save citizens of the Commonwealth time and money, and leverage significant commonwealth investment in existing facilities and technology infrastructure to provide critical services.

Description of the Business Problem

Virginia's death certification process began with a manual paperwork exercise documenting the information about the decedent. This typically would take place in the funeral director's office with the family. If the death was unattended or there were other extenuating circumstances, the death was most likely initiated by a medical examiner's office. The decedent's information then was transported by vehicle to a physician's office to try and obtain a signature on the death certificate. After some back and forth, the death would be officially documented with the state, again through a manual process.

Obtaining a birth certificate posed similar challenges. Prior to March 1, 2014, the only way to obtain a same-day birth certificate was to travel to Richmond. This frequently involved hours of travel, particularly from the more rural areas of the state, and associated expenses. For those who are unable to make the trip to Richmond, an expedited birth certificate (issued in two to five days) was available through a vendor at a cost of more than $50. The only other method to receive a certified copy of a birth certificate was to complete the vital records application, mail it to the Richmond office where it was processed and mailed back. The average time to receive a certificate was three days to process in addition to mailing time on both ends. This important government service that often required immediacy had limited availability to the citizens of Virginia.

Solution

The Virginia Department of Health (VDH) and the Virginia Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV) know that providing customer service and accessibility to information to citizens is paramount. Paperwork, travel and related expenses, time constraints and, often costs that were too high, were encountered by citizens seeking birth certificates and registering the death of a loved one.

[Virginia's Electronic Death Registration System (EDRS)](#) was launched by VDH in November 2014. This system enables participants in the death registration process to file death records online with VDH vital records, creating the option of a paperless system. This facilitates collaboration among multiple death registration users, including funeral homes, hospitals, nursing homes, physicians, medical examiners and DVR. With the advent of the EDRS, funeral directors, physicians and medical certifiers will be able to complete their part of the death registration process faster, with fewer errors and more efficiently.

The EDRS is a secure, completely Web-based tool that allows the decedent's information to be collected and validated online. Once the information is complete, through online workflow, the certificate is passed to the appropriate attending physician who may electronically sign the death certificate. The certificate, again through workflow, is passed to VDH vital records where a final certification number is

assigned. The originator of the death certification process is notified that the record is complete and certified copies of the death certificate may then be ordered. Currently, there are more than 4,000 users of the EDRS, both inside VDS and throughout Virginia.

VDH then collaborated with DMV to make [birth certificates](#) available through more than 75 DMV customer service centers and five DMV mobile units across Virginia.

In the 2013 legislative session, both agencies supported a bill that authorized their partnership to issue vital VDH records through the DMV service centers. Through the innovative use of technology, the agencies developed a distributed services platform that enables DMV to query the vital records database, retrieve information needed and print a certified birth certificate on secure paper for qualified customers.

VDH and DMV designed, developed and implemented the transactions utilizing a secure Web service with associated XML schemas to support the issuance of birth certificates at the DMV customer service centers. The secure Web service enables a critical, real-time data exchange between DMV's customer service application (mySelect) and the VDH's vital records application (Virginia Vital Events Screening and Tracking System or VVESTS). The Web service consists of several operations to support this new business process and partnership.

- RequestCertificate – To establish a Vital Record Application in VVESTS, perform an initial search of VDH database and return results and data for birth certificate print.
- CompleteTransaction – To inform VDH disposition of DMV transaction
- VoidTransaction – To inform VDH about any transactions voided at DMV
- CorrectInventory – To inform VDH about document number updates within a DMV completed transaction

Supported through the real-time data exchange, the *my*Select print engine evaluates the data received from VDH to dynamically display, format and populate the certificate fields appropriate for the certificate type. There are four primary certificates, each with myriad variations driven by the data received from VDH. This secure process for obtaining vital records through DMV is the same process used by the VDH vital records. Customers complete an application, submit the required documentation and pay a fee to the agency.

Both projects were carried out using project management and security best practices, while communicating with stakeholders along the way.

Benefits of the Project

At the loss of a loved one or at the need for a birth certificate, state-issued paperwork is essential. Virginia has improved processes to ensure easier access to these two

essential services. In addition to eliminating paperwork and travel, EDRS reduces the timeframe for certifying a death from several days and sometimes one or two weeks to just a few hours. Birth certificates can be issues upon request.

Since the March 1, 2014, launch of birth certificate services at the DMV customer service centers, 129,323 (as of May 26, 2015) birth certificates were issues. Several thousand additional applications were processed and forwarded to VDH for priority escalation servicing due to issues on the record. DMV charges a small processing fee of $2 in addition to the $12 fee at vital records. This represents more than $250,000 in new revenue to the commonwealth in the first year, while actually saving citizens the travel expense or high processing and shipping fees that exist when obtaining the birth certificate through a vendor.

The volume of DMV issuance clearly demonstrates the value of this service to the citizens of Virginia – particularly those located outside of the Richmond area. These certificates are needed to provide identification for critical employment, family and other government service reasons. The value of the ability to receive a certified birth certificate the same day at the local DMV office cannot be overstated. At DMV alone, thousands of customers seeking licenses, vehicle titles and other DMV products and services, were turned away every year because they did not have necessary identification documents. On average, 92 percent of these customers now can receive critical DMV services because their birth records can be obtained at the local office at the same time they apply for an ID card or driver's license.

The numbers of transactions are impressive, but the real value comes in the convenience to customers. Travel, long lines at the single vital records office, waiting on the mail and high cost of obtaining birth certificate from a vendor have been eliminated.

Through the VDH and DMV collaborative project and the VDH individual project, the state has created distributed service models that generate revenue, save citizens of the Commonwealth time and money, and leverages significant commonwealth investment in existing facilities and technology infrastructure to provide critical services.

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The DMV/VDH partnership was recognized with a 2014 Governor's Technology Award.

This project supports governor's and state's goals and priorities and NASCIO priorities:

- NASCIO State CIO Priorities for 2015
  Budget and Cost Control, Human Resources/Talent Management, Mobile Services/Mobility/Enterprise Mobility Management and Customer Relationship Management
- Governor's Policy Priorities
  Innovation, Fiscal Stewardship, Cyber Security and Upgraded Technology, Customer Service and Accessibility

- [Virginia Performs 2014 Strategic Plan](#)
  Government and Citizens