

NASCIO State IT Recognition Awards 2019

Government Ethics Commission Case Management System

Oregon Government Ethics Commission

<https://apps.oregon.gov/ogec/cms>

Category: Digital Government: Government to Citizen

Project Initiation: August 2016
Project Completion: December 2017

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Executive Summary

The Oregon Government Ethics Commission (OGEC) is charged to impartially and effectively administer and enforce Oregon's government ethics laws for the benefit of Oregon's citizens. OGEC's Case Management process was historically a manual endeavor conducted via mail and hardcopy forms. The result was that all of OGEC's public records were on paper, requiring the public to visit the OGEC office to view record details, or request and pay for copies to be made and delivered for inspection. This manual process was costly, prone to delays and human error, and created barriers to the public accessing the information, otherwise intended to promote government transparency.

During the 2015 Legislative Sessions, House Bill 2019 amended ORS 244.290 to include providing case management advisory opinions and findings issued by OGEC, in a web-searchable format for review by the public. The Legislature amended the statute to set a January 1, 2017 deadline for providing this information online. In order for online records to be complete and accessible, a fully electronic case management solution was required. To meet the January 1, 2017 deadline, OGEC successfully launched a new online system that allowed agency staff to upload advice and final disposition documentation, and allowed the public to search and access this information. The system was further enhanced over the next 11 months through the addition of both an online public complaint submission form, as well as a robust agency administrative solution to further improve case tracking.

The Electronic Case Management System provides:

- Public online complaint submission, advice and final disposition search.
- Secure online case tracking and management.
- Increased transparency and accessibility through digital delivery of public records requests.
- Reduced time, effort, and cost for the public to file complaints, and the agency to process complaints and manage cases.
- Elimination of the costs and delays inherent in the paper mailing process.
- Roughly 1,200 hours of OGEC staff time will be re-allocated from processing tasks to higher impact activities, such as auditing and investigation.
- \$14k is expected to be saved from printing, mailing, and storage costs annually.

Project Narrative

EXEMPLAR

During the 2015 Legislative Sessions, House Bill 2019 amended ORS 244.290 to include providing case management advisory opinions and findings issued by the Oregon Government Ethics Commission (OGEC) in a web-searchable format for review by the public. The Legislature amended the statute to set a January 1, 2017 deadline for providing this information online. Taking this mandate a step further, the OGEC developed a Case Management System that digitizes the entire process. From complaint submission through case management, final disposition, and public records requests, this system drastically improves how OGEC performs its service to Oregonians.

CONCEPT

Project Approach and Costs

To build the system, OGEC chose to leverage the established public-private partnership available through the Office of the State CIO through the Oregon E-Government Program. OGEC successfully worked with this program on its Electronic Filing System and was able to bring the lessons learned from that project to the Case Management System. Having previously transformed another paper process into an online service, the familiarity between the teams was a great asset. Leveraging a shared service provided by the state that provides collaborative oversight for projects between the commission, the program, and the contractor was also an important consideration for choosing the E-Government Program.

PMBOK project management protocols were leveraged to help effectively track requirements definitions, timelines, risks and delivery. Seven (7) OGEC project team members provided subject matter expertise throughout requirements gathering and user acceptance testing. Project managers, business analysts, and programmers worked with OGEC using Agile methodologies. This helped maintain the project focus during the gathering of requirements and definitions, and deliver usable functionality relevant to process improvement goals. The system is funded through an annual subscription service fee of \$88,200. Incremental monthly billing occurred throughout the first three (3) phases of the project, so that only functionality which had been successfully deployed for intended use was billed.

After documenting all paper-based processes, and soliciting feedback for process improvements from OGEC staff, Commissioners, and members of the public, the project was broken into three (3) phases. This was done to both meet the January 1 Legislative deadline for public search functionality, and also to enable system improvements throughout the project, as functionality moved from design through implementation and completion. This feedback loop improved the overall usability of the system for both the public and OGEC staff users.

Advice and Case Findings Transparency and Accessibility

The advice and case findings produced by OGEC are public record and may help individuals avoid ethics violations, as each provides context-specific guidance and interpretation of laws and statutes. An online system replaces a cumbersome, costly paper-based process that hindered OGEC's ability to provide timely information to the public. Citizens faced an innate barrier to accessing ethics information because it could only be obtained in paper form which required either a physical visit to the office or a timely delay waiting for the information to be delivered via mail, both of which required the submission of an Open Records request and payment. The new online system provides real transparency and accessibility by giving immediate online access to OGEC advice and case findings, from anywhere in the world, any time of day.

SIGNIFICANCE

Serving the Public

The OGEC Case Management System provides the public with the ability to search ethics advice provided to any party by OGEC, and case findings from completed ethics violation cases. Advice is searchable by keyword, dates, requester, advice number, category, jurisdiction, and advice type. Case findings, or "Final Dispositions" are searchable by keyword, dates, case number, complainant, respondent, category, and jurisdiction. The System also provides the public with the ability to submit complaints online, including secure document, video, or audio upload of materials supporting their complaint.

Improving Staff Efficiency and Accuracy

The administrative interface of the Case Management System feeds information into the above public searches. It also tracks complaints received, provides OGEC with the ability to review and respond to complaints, and also transitions a complaint into a case.

Once a case has been established, there are complex requirements for reviewing, investigating, responding and documenting case activities. The Case Management System supports all of these functions, including statutory date requirement tracking, required documentation templates, and detailed note keeping. Once a case has been reviewed by the Commission and a Final Disposition is published, this document is flagged to be searchable by the public. Any sanctions or penalties assessed by the Commission for a case may also be tracked within the system.

The Case Management System represents a transition from paper-based case filings, desk workstation dependencies, and timely documentation organization and retrieval practices that are prone to human error.

The Bigger Picture

The OGE Case Management System is a reflection of the larger goals and priorities throughout the state including: Gubernatorial transparency and ethics goals; and State CIO priorities, including Cloud Solutions, Shared Services, Agile and Incremental Software Delivery. Governor Kate Brown has been very focused and committed to improving the transparency of critical government ethics filings, and ensuring that the public can: access OGE and directly access ethics violation findings; and submit complaints online. Stemming in large part from the ethics scandal that caused her predecessor John Kitzhaber to resign, Governor Brown worked closely with OGE to move the ethics complaint submission process and information sharing online. Prior to deploying the Case Management System, the public could only access this information on paper after submitting an Open Records Request, paying printing fees, and waiting days or weeks, depending on the amount of information being requested. Interested Oregonians and the public in general can now access this information 24x7 for free, from the comfort of their home.

This project incorporates the *NASCIO State CIO Top Ten Priorities for 2019* of: Consolidation/Optimization; Digital Government; and Budget, Cost Control and Fiscal Management, and is a great example of technical enhancements that directly benefit the public by making state government better.

IMPACT

Immediately, OGE has improved processing time, accuracy, and efficiency of new and active cases using the new Case Management System. New advice and case findings from cases closed since the system launch will continue to be done directly in the

system. As of April 2018, there were 159 closed cases and 148 open cases in the system. Over time, the ratio of data available to the public through the Case Management System search will exceed those stored offline. This will significantly reduce the staff time required to retrieve records, and the storage costs for paper files.

Moving forward, the OGEC Case Management System provides Commission staff with an improved case management workflow. It also enables OGEC to efficiently keep cases moving efficiently through investigation and makes findings, advice requested, and responses to public records requests, easily available to the public in a timely manner for less cost.

Business Process and Service Level Improvement

The OGEC Case Management System represents a new way of doing business for a previously paper based process and provides: a simpler process for OGEC staff; streamlined process for public submissions; and access to ethics advice and case findings. Members of the public may now provide details about the individual they are listing in their complaint. This ensures that complaints are thorough and meet all the required submission details, enabling parties to upload a variety of documents and artifacts such as audio or video recordings. The complainant is also required to provide their contact information, which will prevent anonymous submissions. OGEC may then review complaints, and determine whether each has merit and requires a case to be opened. Once a complaint becomes a case, OGEC investigators have detailed controls to track the timing of required milestones, any attorneys involved, categories (which later help with the public search of case findings), applicable statutes, statutory requirements fulfilled, notes on all investigative activities, as well as files and links associated with the investigation that become part of a case record.

Official OGEC documentation required throughout the life of a case is produced using system generated templates and are stored within the case for accurate record keeping. Each action taken in the system is logged for auditing and issue resolution. For historical reference, an original copy of the complaint submission is kept along with the evolving details of the case. After case findings are reviewed with Commissioners, any Commission penalties or sanctions assigned are tracked within the case, to ensure timely fulfillment and completion. If questions arise about the complaint, the supporting documentation, or the investigation, the Case Management System is a single source of record, with system generated date/time/user stamps. This serves in the building of a historical record that includes who did what and when. These tools make OGEC records more reliable, and easier to maintain and audit over time.

With the ability to clearly track case artifacts and communications, the system supported timeline milestones tracking, and required document preparation, OGEC's level of quality service improves overall. With accurate, complete records, mistakes are nearly eliminated, response times to public inquiries is reduced, confidence in OGEC processes and accuracy increase, and the ability for OOGEC to deliver their charge as a commission is fulfilled.

Improving opportunities for statewide ethics compliance

By making advice and case findings available online in a format that is intuitive and easy to search, anyone can review and learn from OGEC interactions with other parties. When a public official, attorney or other person asks OGEC a question related to an ethical matter, that question, the correspondence with OGEC, and the official advice provided is all made available to the public with details such as date range, jurisdiction, and category (Conflicts of Interest, Gifts, Use of Official Position for Financial Gain, etc.) to help reviewers find relevant advice in an intuitive manner. By increasing statewide access to both advice and case findings, public officials have a greater body of knowledge by which to guide their ethical decision making.