

National Association of State Chief Information Officers (NASCIO) 2003 Recognition Award Nomination

Title of Nomination: State of Indiana Online Legislative Services

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Category for judging: Digital Government: Government to Citizen

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Executive Summary

In years past, it was time-consuming and labor-intensive for Hoosier citizens to keep track of legislative actions and to identify and contact their legislators. Citizens had to check the General Assembly calendars, search the General Assembly Web site on a daily basis, rummage through newspapers for relevant articles, or call the State House to check the status of bills. They had to gather information from several state agencies to identify and contact their legislators since different pieces of this information are maintained by different agencies. In its commitment to encouraging public participation in government, the state of Indiana wanted to provide its constituents with easy ways to track proposed state legislation and identify and contact their legislators. In 2002, *accessIndiana* led the development of the *BillWatch* legislation tracker and the *Who's Your Legislator?* Geographic Information System (GIS) service, both aimed at improving public participation in Indiana state government.

BillWatch is a free e-mail notification service that allows Indiana citizens, businesses, students, and governments to track up to 5 bills scheduled for action on the floors of the House and Senate. *BillWatch* users no longer have to spend hours each day researching updates to legislation, they can simply check their e-mail accounts for the latest developments in the Indiana General Assembly. Since its launch in January 2003, over 6,100 people have registered to use this service.

Who's Your Legislator? is a Geographic Information System (GIS) service that allows citizens to participate in the legislative process by providing Hoosiers with a quick and easy search tool for identifying and contacting their state elected representatives. By simply typing their zip code or clicking on their approximate geographic location on the Indiana map, citizens can determine their legislative district and State Senator, State Representative, and U.S. Congressional Representative. In addition, the service provides automatically generated links to the legislators' Web sites, which provide details about the legislator such as his/her political party, sponsored legislation, and e-mail address. The *Who's Your Legislator?* service also helps citizens identify and contact state-wide elected officials, including the Governor, Auditor of State, Attorney General, Treasurer of State, and U.S. Senators. Since its launch in February 2003, over 15,000 people have already used this service.

Both services offer significant benefits to Indiana citizens, businesses, and government:

- Time and Cost Savings
- Comprehensive Information on the Indiana General Assembly
- Enhanced Opportunities for Participation in Government
- Increased Knowledge of State Legislative Actions

BillWatch and *Who's Your Legislator?* have saved citizens, businesses, and government an estimated \$7.8 million in time and expenses over the last four months alone.

Public response to these online services has been overwhelming positive. Users have commented on their improved access to legislators through these easy-to-use Web services and have expressed a desire to make sure these projects are continued.

Description of project, including length of time in operation:

Prior to the introduction of the *BillWatch* legislation tracking service, it was difficult for citizens to learn about proposed and recently passed legislation. Concerned citizens had to manually verify the status of bills. They had to check the General Assembly calendars, search the General Assembly Web site on a daily basis to learn about updates, or rummage through newspapers for relevant articles. Other citizens inundated the Legislative Services Agency and legislators' offices with calls, letters, and e-mails. This made it labor intensive for Hoosiers to stay informed of legislative actions and created a significant amount of work for state employees.

It was also difficult for citizens to identify and contact their legislators. Prior to the introduction of the Who's Your Legislator? GIS application, citizens had to determine which districts they resided in by examining separate district maps of State Senate districts and State House districts made available through the Secretary of State Web site. Even this initial task proved intimidating to some citizens, as it required knowledge of state geography. Then users had to use the General Assembly Web site's list of legislators by district to find the names of their legislators. They would have to visit other parts of the General Assembly Web site or an individual legislator's Web site to obtain e-mail addresses, Web site addresses, and legislation sponsorship details. Further complications arose with 2001 redistricting, which left many Hoosiers unsure of their districts and legislators.

In 2002, *accessIndiana* led the development of the *BillWatch* legislation tracking service and the *Who's Your Legislator?* Geographic Information System (GIS) service, both aimed at improving public participation in Indiana state government. The *BillWatch* service was launched in January 2003, and *Who's Your Legislator?* was launched in February 2003. Consequently, the state's public participation program has only been in operation for less than four months. Both services are easily accessible from the *accessIndiana* home page at www.IN.gov.



BillWatch

BillWatch was developed in the Fall of 2002 for the 2003 Indiana Legislative Session. This free e-mail notification service allows Indiana citizens, businesses, students, and governments to track up to 5 bills scheduled for action on the floors of the House and Senate. Users receive daily e-mail notifications of action taken on selected bills as updates are made to the Legislative Services Agency database. As users register for *BillWatch*, they are asked to provide their first name, e-mail address, and the bill numbers they wish to track. Users unsure of the exact bill number they wish to track can look at *BillWatch's* List of Bills to determine the names and numbers of all bills introduced on the House and Senate floors during the current legislative session. Through the *BillWatch* Web site, users can also research bills and resolutions and check legislative calendars.

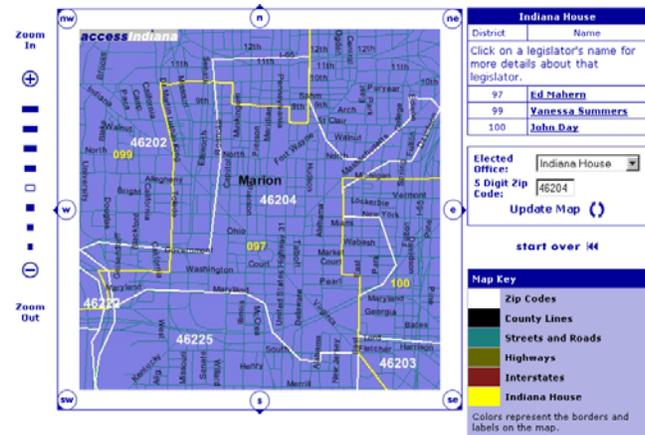
Since its January 7, 2003 launch date, over 6,100 people have signed up for *BillWatch*. Citizens have been delighted with the service:

- "Thank you for offering the *BillWatch* service for free. I've seen a similar service offered by [a local organization], but their services are too costly for the average concerned taxpayer like me. I think this is a great service! Keep up the good work!"
- "I would like to know who was responsible for funding and establishing the Bill Watch website. I think it is a great public service and should be continued. How can I help to see that it is continued?"

In the near future, the *BillWatch* application will provide enhanced tracking capabilities and feature a "notes" section for users. This year, *BillWatch* users were only allowed to track up to five bills at a time because it was difficult for *accessIndiana* staff to estimate how many people would use this new service. *accessIndiana* staff will monitor server loads for the 2003 legislative session so they can allow users to track more bills next year. The planned addition of a "notes" section to *BillWatch* will allow users to store personal notes on legislation in their user profile.

Who's Your Legislator?

The Secretary of State's Office, Legislative Services Agency, the Information Technology Oversight Commission (ITOC), and *accessIndiana* teamed together to develop *Who's Your Legislator?*, one of the state's first Geographic Information System (GIS) services. *Who's Your Legislator?* utilizes the Environmental Systems Research Institute's (ESRI) ArcIMS, an Internet Map Service that produces images based on spatial data. To successfully use the system, a user need only know his/her zip code or approximate geographic location on the Indiana map. Since legislative districts often do not correspond to roads, county lines, or zip code boundaries, the *Who's Your Legislator?* GIS map layers include roads, major highways, county lines, zip code boundaries, and legislative districts to provide Hoosiers with a simple and convenient way to determine their legislative districts and identify their State Senator, State Representative, and U.S. Congressional Representative. *Who's Your Legislator?* also makes it easy for Hoosiers to participate in government by providing specific details about legislators, including his/her political party, legislation sponsorship, Web site address, and e-mail address. In addition, *Who's Your Legislator?* helps citizens identify and contact state-wide elected officials, including the Governor, Auditor of State, Attorney General, Treasurer of State, and U.S. Senators.



Since its February 2003 launch, approximately 15,000 people have used the *Who's Your Legislator?* application. The application has received much positive feedback from users:

- "It is very helpful to have this information available to contact our 'voice' in Indianapolis."
- "I really appreciate the map and info. I had no trouble at all locating and using this system. Bravo! Tnx..."
- "Excellent, easy to use, and functional application. I thought that the site was very easy to use and very friendly. I think that it is a great tool. Thank you."

Significance to the improvement of the operation of government:

The state of Indiana is committed to encouraging public participation in government by making it easier for citizens to interact with legislators. To increase access to legislative information, the state of Indiana wanted to provide its constituents with easy ways to track proposed state legislation and identify and contact their legislators.

The *BillWatch* legislation tracker was developed to allow citizens interested in learning about proposed and recently passed legislation an easy way to obtain this information. Prior to the implementation of this application, users were required to manually verify the status of bills. They had to check the General Assembly calendars, search the General Assembly Web site on a daily basis to learn about updates, or search the newspaper for relevant articles. Other citizens inundated the Legislative Services Agency and legislators' offices with calls, letters, and e-mails. This made it labor intensive for Hoosiers to stay informed of legislative actions and created a significant amount of work for state employees. Now, citizens interested in tracking Indiana legislation can simply register with *BillWatch* and check their e-mail accounts for the latest legislative updates. Furthermore, calls concerning the status of proposed legislation to the Legislative Services Agency and the State Information Center have decreased over the last four months.

The *Who's Your Legislator?* Web service was developed to provide Hoosiers with an easy way to identify and contact their legislators. Prior to the invention of the *Who's Your Legislator?* GIS service, citizens had to determine which districts they resided in by examining separate district maps of State Senate districts and State House districts made available through the Secretary of State Web site. Even this initial task proved intimidating to some citizens, as it required knowledge of state geography. Then users had to use the General Assembly

Web site's list of legislators by district to find the names of their legislators. They would have to visit other parts of the General Assembly Web site or an individual legislator's Web site to obtain e-mail addresses, Web site addresses, and legislation sponsorship details. Further complications arose with 2001 redistricting, which left many Hoosiers unsure of their districts and legislators. The *Who's Your Legislator?* Web service has greatly simplified interaction with state elected officials and U.S. Representatives by allowing any citizen to obtain legislative contact information by simply typing in his/her zip code or clicking on his/her approximate geographic location on the Indiana map.

Benefits realized by service recipients, taxpayers, agency, or state:

The State of Indiana Online Legislative Services provide a comprehensive resource for Indiana legislative information, making it easier for citizens and businesses to participate in government and to become knowledgeable of legislators' actions.

- **Time and Cost Savings for Users and Government.** *BillWatch* and *Who's Your Legislator?* save users and government both time and money. *BillWatch* reduces the amount of research necessary for citizens, businesses, and governments to track a bill's status. *Who's Your Legislator?* saves citizens time by eliminating the need to perform extensive research to identify and contact legislators. Both applications reduce telephone calls to state government offices, thereby allowing state agencies to redirect staff to other customers who require more personalized attention.
- **Comprehensive Information on the Indiana General Assembly.** The State of Indiana's Online Legislative Resources serve as a means for obtaining Indiana legislative information. *BillWatch* allows citizens to research bills and resolutions, track legislation, and check session calendars. *Who's Your Legislator?* allows Hoosiers to determine their legislative district; identify their elected representatives in the state and federal governments; and to obtain specific information about legislators such as their political party affiliation, Web site address, e-mail address, and legislation sponsorship information.
- **Enhanced Opportunities for Participation in Government.** *BillWatch* and *Who's Your Legislator?* make it seemingly effortless for Hoosiers to participate in government. With *BillWatch*, citizens, businesses, students, and governments can simply check their e-mail accounts for the latest updates concerning actions of the Indiana General Assembly. *Who's Your Legislator?* provides a simple, convenient way for Indiana citizens to identify and contact their elected representatives.
- **Increased Knowledge of State Legislative Actions.** The State of Indiana Online Legislative Services make it easier for Indiana citizens to stay informed of actions of the State House and Senate. *BillWatch* allows citizens to track legislation, while *Who's Your Legislator?* allows Hoosiers to connect representatives to the legislation they sponsor. These two applications allow Hoosiers to have a more comprehensive understanding of what the Indiana General Assembly and specific legislators are doing to serve the citizens of Indiana.

Return on investment, short-term/long-term payback (including summary calculations). Projects must exhibit measurable operational benefit:

Because of the *accessIndiana* Web portal's unique self-funding model, *BillWatch* and *Who's Your Legislator?* were created without the use of any appropriated tax dollars. Indiana Interactive, Inc., the private company chosen to manage the state's Web portal in 1995, provides the state with free Web development, hosting, maintenance, and marketing in exchange for the opportunity to assess modest convenience fees (referred to as *Enhanced Access Fees*) on a select set of commercially valuable information and services. Most of the fee-based online services are geared toward business users, as research has proven that businesses are willing-to-pay a fee for instant access to records that might otherwise take weeks to obtain. *BillWatch* and *Who's Your Legislator?* are among the many free online services offered through the *accessIndiana* Web portal.

The *BillWatch* and *Who's Your Legislator?* Web services have resulted in significant time and cost savings for *accessIndiana* users and government, created a comprehensive source of information about the General Assembly, increased participation in government, and improved knowledge of state legislative actions. While some of these benefits are difficult to measure, some early attempts have been made to measure cost and time savings achieved through these Web applications.

<p>Low Cost Savings Scenario January 2003 – April 2003 The least citizens and government saved with <i>BillWatch</i> and <i>Who's Your Legislator?</i></p> <p>Assumptions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Time is valued at \$10/hour, allowing for differences in value of time between citizen and business users of <i>BillWatch</i> ➤ Prior to the invention of <i>BillWatch</i>, state employees spent at least one hour assisting each of <i>BillWatch</i>'s 6,100 users during any given legislative session ➤ <i>Who's Your Legislator?</i> users would have spent (20) minutes conducting manual searches in multiple, unrelated sites to obtain the same information that can now be obtained in several clicks. <p>BillWatch Time Savings to Customers 1 hour per day * 80 days * \$10/hour *6,100 BillWatch users = \$4,880,000</p> <p>Decreased Calls to State Employees 1 hour during legislative session * 6,100 BillWatch users * \$10/hour = \$61,000</p> <p>Who's Your Legislator? Time Savings to Customers 20 minutes to find information manually * 15,000 <i>Who's Your Legislator?</i> users * \$10/hour = \$50,000</p> <p>Total Savings: \$4,991,000</p>	<p>High Cost Savings Scenario January 2003 – April 2003 The most citizens and government saved with <i>BillWatch</i> and <i>Who's Your Legislator?</i></p> <p>Assumptions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Time is valued at \$10/hour, allowing for differences in value of time between citizen and business users of <i>BillWatch</i> ➤ <i>BillWatch</i> users avoided expense of another legislative tracking service (approximately \$1000/legislative session) ➤ Prior to the introduction of <i>BillWatch</i>, state employees spent at least one hour assisting each of <i>BillWatch</i>'s 6,100 users during any given legislative session ➤ Each <i>BillWatch</i> user would have spent one hour each day during the 80 day legislative session manually researching legislation ➤ All <i>Who's Your Legislator?</i> users would have used more manual online process to identify legislators without benefit of <i>Who's Your Legislator?</i> (would take 1 hour to locate all this information manually) <p>BillWatch Time Savings to Customers 1 hour per day * 80 days * \$10/hour *6,100 BillWatch users = \$4,880,000</p> <p>Cost Savings to Customers \$1000 (Cost for Substitute Service) * 6,100 BillWatch users = \$6,100,000</p> <p>Decreased Calls to State Employees 1 hour during legislative session * 6,100 BillWatch users * \$10/hour = \$61,000</p> <p>Who's Your Legislator? Time Savings to Customers 1 hour to find information manually * 15,000 <i>Who's Your Legislator?</i> users * \$10/hour = \$150,000</p> <p>Total Savings: \$11,191,000</p>
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By averaging these two benefits estimates, one can surmise that these two Web applications have saved Indiana citizens, businesses, and governments approximately \$7.8 million over the last four months alone. Of course, these estimates do not include less tangible benefits, such as increased public participation in government and enhanced awareness of state legislative actions. The state can expect even greater returns on its investment in the democratic process during the coming years.