

Title of Nomination: Washington INET Application
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Washington INET Application -- first released October 2001
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Overview

Over the past decade recruiting and retaining a public sector workforce has been an increasingly difficult task. We have seen a national trend that includes a sharp rise (nearly 30% of the existing state workforce by 2005) in the number of retiring staff, an increase in the demands for public services, and massive budget reductions coupled with ongoing efforts to reduce the public sector workforce. All of these trends translate into a critical need to invent creative and effective techniques to hire qualified staff while reducing costs and improving processing efficiencies.

The Washington State INET Application (INET App) project addresses this critical need!

The state Department of Personnel (DOP) has been recruiting applicants for many years using paper applications and manually reviewing the individuals' qualifications. However, the process of application has been a challenge for many individuals. Historically, applicants could only apply for jobs when a recruitment announcement was opened. The process required an individual to spend hours preparing an application for submission. Then, processing the applications often took weeks (frequently 35 days or more) before the applicants' names are available to hiring managers.

The application process should not be an obstacle for those interested in joining the public sector workforce. Through a variety of process changes, use of the Internet and new screening techniques, INET App removes many of the components that create this barrier. Individuals can now apply for positions anytime they desire because recruitments are open continuously. Individuals are processed immediately upon entering their application on-line, receiving their application results in seconds. Hiring managers have access to new applicants in a matter of minutes rather than days, weeks or months. Applicants can self-manage their availability for jobs.

In the short time this project has been operational, DOP has seen an 85% increase in applications, a major increase in customer satisfaction and a significant decrease in operational costs. In addition, DOP is better positioned to move in new directions for recruitment and assessment to meet the ever-changing needs of the public sector.

a) Description of project

Washington INET Application

Over the past decade recruiting and retaining a public sector workforce has been an increasingly difficult task. We have seen a national trend that includes a sharp rise (nearly 30% of the existing state workforce by 2005) in the number of retiring staff, an increase in the demand for public services, and massive budget reductions coupled with ongoing efforts to reduce the public sector workforce. All of these trends translate into a critical need to invent creative and efficient techniques to hire qualified staff while reducing costs.

The Washington State INET Application (INET App) project addresses this critical need!

The Washington State Department of Personnel (DOP) provides staffing services for 70 state agencies with a combined workforce of approximately 50,000 employees allocated to 1800 job classifications. Work locations are distributed geographically throughout state in several hundred work sites. Each year, approximately 75,000 employment applications are received and approximately 4,000 positions are filled.

The Department's mission is to support and facilitate state government's efforts to attract, develop, and retain a productive and diverse workforce that is capable of delivering quality services to citizens of Washington State. A key goal in support of this mission is to recruit, screen, test, and certify qualified, available job candidates to hiring managers in the shortest time possible

The INET App was created to provide state agencies with easy access to qualified, available, and diverse job candidates as quickly as possible. Despite efforts to streamline the manual recruitment process that reduced the average cycle time from twelve weeks in 1995 to five weeks in 2001, satisfaction rates for recruitment cycle time, candidate quality, and candidate availability were 43%, 39%, and 48%, respectively, according to a survey of state hiring managers conducted in May 2001. The results indicated that the process needed more than streamlining; it required a major systemic change.

The INET App addresses a number of issues inherent to the traditional recruitment process, which has proven to be cumbersome, paper-laden, complex, and labor-intensive. It directly addresses hiring managers' needs in that it is flexible, paperless, cost-efficient, and provides a current list of qualified candidates, while reducing the recruitment cycle time from several weeks to a few hours.

The INET App also addresses the needs of job seekers. It allows applicants to apply and test via the Internet, and provides them instant notification of their test results and application status. It also reduces duplicative efforts by saving personal profile information and making it available to apply for multiple positions. The profile can be updated as necessary.

As more and more job classes are converted to the INET App system, the Department of Personnel experienced significant savings in time spent in application processing and routine database updating, as well as cost savings in postage, printing, and application storage. Staff are getting out of the business of manual processing, screening, and testing activities and are able to use their expertise to provide enhanced services, such as strategic recruitment and professional consultation to address specific agency needs.

The INET App introduces a new level of technology to the recruitment process. It takes a slow and cumbersome paper process and brings it to the instant-access world of the Internet:

Typical Traditional Process	Internet Application Process
1. Publish and distribute recruitment announcement to be open for 2-3 weeks.	1. Recruitment announcement posted to Web site and is open continuously (no closing date).
2. Job seeker fills out separate applications for each announcement.	2. Job seeker enters basic applicant information that can be used for multiple recruitments and takes the corresponding test on-line.
3. Applicant mails or delivers application.	
4. Applications manually screened and coded.	3. The applicant electronically submits the information and receives instant notification of application status and test score.

<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 5. Notices sent through postal service to applicants who didn't pass initial screening. 6. If a multiple-choice exam, the test is scheduled and notices sent to eligible applicants. 7. If an experience and training exam, staff manually review and score. 8. Applicants travel to testing location for a 2-4 hour multiple choice exam. 9. Test score notices prepared and sent through postal service to candidates. 10. Candidate information and test score is manually entered into database and placed on the register for referral. 11. Hiring agency electronically accesses candidate referral only after steps 1-10 have been completed. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 4. Concurrently, all candidate information is converted into database and candidate's name is placed on register. 5. Hiring agency electronically accesses candidate referral from the register at any time.
Average Cycle Time = 5 Weeks	Average Cycle Time = 2-3 Hours

b) Significance to the improvement of the operation of government

This new Internet Application system is a vast improvement over the state's paper-based recruitment and selection process, which had remained substantially unchanged for nearly four decades. The old process was cumbersome, paper-laden, complex, and labor-intensive. Despite an aggressive streamlining effort that reduced the average recruitment cycle time from approximately 12 weeks in 1995 to 5 weeks in 2001, the existing system couldn't keep pace with changing customer needs and expectations.

State agencies operate in a fast-paced, demanding environment and managers need access to qualified, available candidates to fill vacancies as soon as possible. A system that took five weeks to produce a list of eligible candidates did not meet their business needs. The slow, cumbersome process also presented an obstacle to the state's ability to compete for top quality candidates. Many excellent candidates would be discouraged from applying at all, or would be snatched up by other employers while their application was still being processed by the state.

By taking advantage of Internet technology, the Department of Personnel was able to create an entirely new paperless system that is fast, flexible, and cost-effective. The new Internet Application system also meets the requirements of hiring managers for a process that could be tailored to their individual recruitment needs; be customized to select for position-specific skills; and provide up-to-date, easily accessible candidate information.

The Internet Application benefits both applicants and hiring managers, by making the entire process faster, easier, and more efficient, while maintaining the fairness and quality of the screening and testing process. The Department of Personnel also benefits from the savings in staff time, postage, printing, and related costs associated with manually processing applications and sending out printed notices. This innovative new system is a winning solution for everyone involved.

c) Benefits realized by service recipients, taxpayers, agency or state

There are a variety of stakeholders using this system- primarily: hiring managers, job applicants, and human resource staff. Each of these stakeholders benefits from this application and find efficiencies in a variety of functions. In addition to any efficiencies, first and foremost, however, the citizens of the state are the primary beneficiaries of INET App. The system will help deliver the best workforce to the agencies providing services to the citizens.

Benefits for Hiring Manager

The new Internet Application system offers managers the prospect of avoiding lengthy delays in filling positions. Cumbersome recruitment publication, application processing and testing procedures are eliminated. The INET App's automated filing and instant evaluation and scoring of relevant skills is designed to reduce the manager's waiting period to zero.

Since the recruitments are always open for application, managers are able to consider the most qualified candidates the labor market can generate up to that point in time. New names are continuously replenishing the registers and keep the candidate qualifications at the highest possible level. Managers are no longer limited to considering candidates who applied during a short two to three week application filing window perhaps six months, a year or even longer in the past. Complaints about having to use a "picked over" list have disappeared.

Managers now considering candidates who have carefully thought through important features of the position before they officially made a decision to submit an application. The web site gives prospective applicants key information about the state of Washington as an employer and the position they are thinking about applying for.

This improved "fit" between job requirements and applicant desires has resulted in managers experiencing fewer job offer turndowns and fewer resignations after just a short stint of employment. Morale is higher and turnover lower because employees find that there is a very close fit between what they thought they were applying for and what they, in fact, are experiencing on the job.

Employment advertising has been more effective and less fraught with timing problems. Managers are able to conduct their own recruitment campaigns without having to worry that ads placed in specialty publications will appear after a filing period has closed. Managers can nurture a steadily strengthening network with various professional groups that accept Internet ad placements and sponsor member job search registries. E-mailed notices to Internet discussion groups can contain a link directly to the Department of Personnel web site.

Benefits for the Job Seeker

The INET App allows persons interested in working for the state of Washington to apply through the Internet at any time of the day or night, seven days a week. There is no longer a rush to meet a rigid deadline to mail or hand deliver an application. It also eliminates the adversarial situation of informing someone that they were "untimely" in submitting their application. While these may seem like minor benefits, it is this kind of customer interaction that drives potentially great candidates away in anger.

Applicants no longer have to worry that if they go out of town for a couple of weeks they risk completely missing a recruitment opportunity for which they have been waiting. There is no longer be a need to take the time to travel a long distance for lengthy paper and pencil testing.

Applicants instantly know if they have passed the test and are on the hiring register as they sign out. No more waiting for a results notice to arrive in the mail or making telephone calls when the results do not seem to be arriving in the mail as quickly as expected.

The applicant profile – which asks for contact information, education and employment history, EEO status, veteran's status, languages and licenses – need only be filled out once rather than for every recruitment. This is a great convenience for people who may be interested in applying for multiple job classes. Typically, most employers require that basic information be submitted anew with each application. Applicants can easily update their existing profile information as needed.

The Department of Personnel's job information website provides applicants with comprehensive information about Washington State government employment (e.g., benefits, training opportunities, etc.) and the unique nature of the position they are applying for. This can help them make a more educated decision about whether or not to submit an application.

In addition, to better match candidates with specific positions, INET App offers a number of avenues within an application to convey personal preferences about working conditions. For example, when applying for an Office Assistant position, applicants can indicate whether they are willing to work in a position that requires four or more

hours per day sitting at a computer entering data. Or, that they are willing and able to lift and carry objects of up to 25 pounds. After reading in the application that some agencies have strict security requirements and require a thorough criminal history check, including fingerprinting, applicants can indicate whether they are open to that specific type of review.

The application requires relatively little time to complete. The electronic form extensively uses “drop down boxes” and “check boxes” as a convenience for the user. Experience with INET App to date indicates an average of 30 minutes to complete the applicant profile. The time to complete the job specific component (which includes the examination) is also averaging 30 minutes. Every page of the INET App form is supplied with a help button to provide additional information to candidates. Enabling users to efficiently move around the form with the fewest number of clicks has been a design goal. Lateral movement has been enabled. Feedback from users has been encouraged and a number of improvements have been made based upon user comments.

Every section of the form that must be completed is identified with a transition marker to indicate that the section has been properly completed. This is a convenience that cannot be provided with a hard copy application. In a traditional paper application, a critical section can be inadvertently missed. The INET App forms are designed so that they cannot be submitted unless all required sections are completed.

Once entered in the database, applicants could receive e-mail notices from the Department’s recruiters about positions that they or their acquaintances might be interested in. For example, assume a manager needs to fill a nursing position at a state hospital in Spokane with a person fluent in Cambodian. The entire database could be searched in a matter of seconds for everyone who indicated in their profile that they could speak Cambodian. Recruiters could then send an e-mail to them asking if they know of a Cambodian speaking nurse who may be interested in that vacancy. Applicants will be able to refer friends and associates to opportunities with the state by simply sending them an email with a note and the INET App link.

Improved Department of Personnel Efficiencies

The INET App system became operational in October 2001 and, as of this writing, is available for 150 job classes. More classes are being added monthly. The Department of Personnel confidently anticipates significant operational efficiencies and associated time and cost savings as it becomes fully implemented.

Printing and postage costs, paper handling time, and paper storage costs have already been greatly reduced. Hours of staff time looking for a lost application is a thing of the past. Staff responding to applicants’ inquiries are able to immediately access and review the entire application from their desktop computer rather than searching through files of paper applications.

Staff time spent in manually updating applicant records (currently running at about 125,000 updates a year) has been greatly reduced because applicants are updating their own information in the database over the Internet.

Initially, much of the freed up staff time has been reinvested in converting even more job class recruitments to the INET App system. Eventually those staffing resources will be redirected to more varied and interesting human resource activities, including: improved program research and data analysis; engagement in effective recruitment strategies; proactive consultation and assistance to agency HR representatives and hiring managers, and other activities that focus on helping managers achieve positive results.

For example, the INET Application database contains a myriad of data for staff to use in analyzing the quality of service being provided to managers throughout state government. Everything in the database is reportable – geographic availability of candidates, candidates who passed examinations by EEO category, education of candidates, and so on. Of most importance, recruitment staff are able to closely monitor the availability of highly qualified candidates in each job classification used at any employment location in the state. Diversity of candidates can also be closely monitored. Information will be readily available to launch aggressive targeted recruiting campaigns in a timely manner.

d) Return on investment, short-term/long-term payback

The state Legislature provided \$515,000 toward startup costs. Actual startup costs were:

Administrative overhead	\$ 604
Equipment	\$178,265
Information Technology Contractors	\$308,282
Professional Development/Training for staff	\$ 17,011
Total expenditures	\$ 504,162

In addition, DOP provided four internal full-time employees to supplement the implementation of the INET App. These included two human resource business representatives, a database architect/developer, and a testing/documentation specialist. The majority of the equipment costs provide expanded web service and database capacity for both development and production systems.

Through improved processing and functionality, INET App has provided significant financial benefits to the State. The list below sums up the improvements and savings that have already occurred. Similar savings will continue to accrue annually as the project continues to grow.

As of **April 11, 2003**, the following have been used as measurements of success for Return On Investment:

- # of applications received through INET App as compared to traditional paper applications (for those job classifications that are currently included in the INET App)
119,718 electronic vs. 5,781 paper applications (95.4 % electronic submission)
- # of staff hours saved by electronic application processing compared to manual processing
26,427 hours
- Postage savings realized by DOP as a result of electronic notification of test results (vs. US postal costs)
\$38,517
- Postage savings realized by applicants as a result of electronic application (vs. US Postal costs)
\$ 136,196
- Number of applicant hours saved by electronic application compared to traditional process (streamlined testing processes used)
161,093 hours
- Increase in state workforce productivity (Current employees staying at work vs. time away from office for testing)
\$699,433

While the cost efficiencies and savings are important, customer satisfaction with the new application process has also improved significantly. Hiring manager's satisfaction rates for recruitment cycle time, candidate quality, and candidate availability were 43%, 39%, and 48%, respectively in 2001 prior to the INET Application project. Survey results in 2003 indicate satisfaction with recruitment cycle time has increased to **93%**, satisfaction with candidate quality has increased to **82%** and satisfaction with candidate availability has increased to **81%**.

What equipment, technology and software are used to operate and administer this program?

The Department of Personnel used Rapid Application Development methodology to develop the INET Application. Feature-based releases were used to manage the modular development of the INET Application. The application uses a Web Based User Interface employing technologies such as COM+, Visual Basic, Active Server Pages, JavaScript, and VBScript. All data is stored in SQL Server 2000 database and all database activities are performed by use of stored procedures. The multi-tier architecture incorporates protocol-based security (HTTPS) and components to facilitate the transfer of data from the web to the mainframe.