

2007 NASCIO Award Submission
Category: Data, Information and Knowledge Management

Project:

Virginia Performs: Virginia's performance, leadership and accountability system

Executive Summary

In order to promote government transparency and provide citizens with a means to track Virginia's quality of life and state government performance, *Virginia Performs*, www.vaperforms.virginia.gov, was launched by Governor Timothy M. Kaine as Chairman of the Council on Virginia's Future (CoVF) in January 2007.

The site was developed and is managed by the Council on Virginia's Future, a state entity established by General Assembly to create a vision for Virginia's future and a governing system that aligns with and supports achievement of the vision. The Council is chaired by the Governor and includes senior General Assembly members, business leaders, and Cabinet members. The Council must develop, monitor and publish performance indicators that track productivity, service performance and progress in achieving long-term objectives. Most importantly, a clear vision of success must be established.

To provide effective baselines and progress measures, CoVF aggregated and published multiple sources and disparate societal data sets, from U.S. Census data and student test scores to crime statistics. Sophisticated mapping and reporting functions allow users to view selected measures by regions and localities, where available. Agency service areas, objectives and measures contain attributes and current data at the performance measure level. A sophisticated keyword search assists users at the agency performance level. The full measures report displays all agency data and performance.

Accessibility to important and often actionable information is a key priority of the initiative (*Virginia Performs* is WAI-compliant). Therefore, high standards of overall usability and specific accessibility for people with disabilities were important business drivers of the site build.

Although much of the data housed on *Virginia Performs* was publicly available previously, it was spread across multiple and often obtuse locations. One example illustrates the benefits. A citizen looking to relocate to or within Virginia might be interested in local factors such as personal income, employment growth, crime and graduation rates. Prior to its online aggregation, that citizen could have researched data from the U.S. Department of Commerce, the U.S. and Virginia Departments of Education, FBI Crime Reports and other sources.

This online platform now informs citizen, business and government users. Government decision making, budgeting, transparency and thus accountability have been expedited and improved. Through troubleshooting, innovation and use of technology, Virginia will continue to lead as a "best managed state."

Description of the problem and solution

Government transparency and better than best practice management are two of Governor Timothy M. Kaine's top priorities as chief executive of the Commonwealth of Virginia. To help achieve these companion goals, citizens and state officials now have a robust new tool to track and improve Virginia's quality of life and service performance by state government thanks to a comprehensive, agile and user-friendly Web site. *Virginia Performs*, www.vaperforms.virginia.gov, was launched by Governor Kaine in his role as Chairman of the Council on Virginia's Future (CoVF) in January 2007.

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Most importantly, a clear vision of success must be established. State agencies must have measurable and published performance goals that align with the long-term vision of the Commonwealth's future. Measurements must be identified, influence of state government on those measures determined, and baselines established. Elected officials, including the Governor and members of the General Assembly, must be able to measure state government's progress towards achieving goals. Service agencies must be able to evaluate areas of strengths and weakness in different geographic areas of the state.

Data elements and presentation were determined collaboratively by a multi-agency work group that balanced relevancy, comparability and sustainability considerations. One year went into conceptual planning. During this period, data sources were identified, indicators chosen and basic structure established. Particular attention was given to the interaction between agency and societal level data. Senior leaders from across the enterprise of Virginia government, including staff from the Governor's Office, Department of Planning and Budget, Department of Juvenile Justice, Department of Health, Department of Motor Vehicles, Department of Human Resource Management, Virginia Information Technologies Agency and the Weldon Cooper Center for Public Service, University of Virginia, participated in this process.

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Virginia Performs presents a clean, uncluttered dashboard approach to assist users in discovering its rich content. The design team solicited feedback during the site build, incorporating citizen suggestions and use patterns into current design and future planning. A prominent feedback link encourages continued dialogue.

Site architecture is clear, intuitive and easy to navigate, using as few "clicks" as possible. The site offers levels of detail, from the at-a-glance summary page to individual indicators in the quality of life section, and from secretariat overviews to data on specific key measures in the agency performance measures section. The look and feel of the site is inviting and incorporates usability and design best practices, such as multiple paths to information, cross-linking and short text blocks with subheads and bullets.

Guidance and user references are available: an overview of Virginia Performs, <http://vaperforms.virginia.gov/about.php>; a comprehensive visitor's guide, <http://vaperforms.virginia.gov/agencylevel/src/VisitorGuide.cfm>, which explains agency benchmarks and performance data, and a help section in the mapping and reporting section. The "Scorecard-at-a-Glance" feature is linked at both top and bottom of the home page.

Virginia Performs is WAI-compliant and conforms to Virginia's accessibility standard. Cascading style sheet (CSS)-driven design is used, with tables used to represent tabular data only. Graphics are used sparingly. CSS capabilities are used to their fullest to provide interest without hindering comprehension for no/low vision users. Colors were selected carefully for contrast and readability; a white background enhances readability.

A clearly stated Web policy is linked from every page and includes information about privacy, cookies, linking policies and the Freedom of Information Act. The site does not solicit personal information. Only a minimum of user information, none that is personally identifiable, is collected by the server logs. Since there are no transactions requiring personal identification on the site, accidental release of citizen information is not possible. Information collected on the site from state agencies for performance management is aggregate data, so it too is secure.

Significance of the project to the improvement of the operation of government

The new information system, best described as a performance accountability system, utilizes a treasure trove of rich data painstakingly collected from many disparate sources to achieve these goals. It ties that data directly to the business of state government, vastly improving the way Virginia measures progress and reports results. Just as importantly, it provides seamless transparency by sharing the same information with policy makers and citizens alike. It supports broad policy decisions in pursuit of long-term objectives and engages citizens in informed dialogue about Virginia's future.

At the citizen level, *Virginia Performs* presents a comprehensive look at the quality of life in Virginia. In addition, the site introduces citizens to the relationship between Virginia's quality of life and state government by highlighting government's involvement with and influence on each quality of life indicator.

Data housed on *Virginia Performs* was publicly available previously, but spread across multiple and often obtuse locations. One example illustrates the benefits. A citizen looking to relocate to or within Virginia might be interested in local factors, such as personal income, employment growth, crime and graduation rates. That citizen would have to have researched data from the U.S. Department of Commerce, the U.S. and Virginia Departments of Education, FBI Crime Reports and other sources prior to its online aggregation in *Virginia Performs*.

Hours upon hours could be spent first searching for the correct source and then digging through vast content to locate the necessary data. When the user located information, it was difficult if not impossible to compare localities and other states; comparing variables over time was even more complicated. Similar roadblocks confronted business and policy makers. Therefore, the amount of time required for informative research has been significantly improved for both citizens and state officials.

State officials now are using *Virginia Performs* as a knowledge bank that is a key tool in achieving goals. As part of the strategic planning process for the 2006-2008 budget, state agencies worked with the Governor's Office, Department of Planning and Budget and others to set performance targets and measure progress for programs and services.

Virginia Performs manages and makes that information public. Agency strategic plans, including key objectives and measures, form the foundation for agency leadership agendas and the performance accountability system. Agencies now regularly report performance results within state government and to citizens and the General Assembly. A vast amount of information generated about and by the state now correlates to specific goals; <http://www.vaperforms.virginia.gov/agencylevel/>.

The unique and groundbreaking functionality created through the *Virginia Performs* information system has enjoyed executive support from its conception. Governor Kaine personally launched the Web site at a news conference on January 3, 2007. The launch was deliberately timed to coincide with the legislative session in order to immediately reach senators, delegates and key aides.

To reinforce the announcement, *Virginia Performs* data was compiled to create specialized "snapshots" of the communities in each legislator's district. Senators, delegates and legislative aides were given this localized information on their communities along with a "Guide to Virginia Performs" and encouraged to use the site and to recommend it to their constituents. These profiles provided local data on key indicators as well as comparisons to the rest of Virginia and to the nation. More than a dozen Model Advisory Panel (MAP) members also participated in a legislative information campaign.

Executive branch agencies represented another key audience because of the importance of their participation; 100% was the desired outcome. Inclusion of agency data from *Virginia Performs* into the statewide planning and budget process guaranteed that this goal was indeed met.

Public value of the project

Virginia Performs is an entirely new and ground-breaking comprehensive policy and accountability framework. It enables aggregation, comparison and analysis of performance data at societal and state agency levels. Users can select, display and report data by secretariat or state agency and by local and regional geographic layers.

The Web site aligns with the Council on Virginia's Future's published long-term goals and desired outcomes; <http://www.future.virginia.gov/roadmap.htm>. For each goal, indicators answer the question, "How is Virginia doing?" Users can monitor progress on key objectives and measures related to government functions. The Web site includes a description of each indicator, a summary of its importance, Virginia's progress, major influences and the state's role; <http://www.vaperforms.virginia.gov/s-HealthFamily.php>. Data also is presented in graph format to facilitate interpretation. Where possible, information is displayed for Virginia over time, by regions and in comparison to other states.

The *Virginia Performs* Web site displays how Virginia is doing in areas that affect quality of life for citizens and business. Users can see how the Commonwealth is performing from region to region and compared to other states, track progress in their communities, and monitor activity on important issues.

The Commonwealth invested approximately \$150,000 in the planning and development of the *Virginia Performs* Web site. All the capabilities are advancements in management capacity and even more importantly in provision of transparent government. This is a completely new tool never before deployed. Therefore, a formal return on investment analysis was not a part of the development process.

Virginia Performs does, however, offer significant return on the investment to its citizens and leaders in terms of management excellence and transparency in government. Achieving high-priority results in alignment with long-term vision and goals forms the enterprise leadership agenda for Virginia state government.

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