

# Washington State's Enterprise Business Portal Initiative

## Executive Summary

"The Next Washington" outlines Governor Gregoire's Open for Business approach to keeping Washington businesses competitive in the world by reducing barriers and improving efficiency. One component of this approach is the Enterprise Business Portal (Business Portal) Initiative ([www.business.wa.gov](http://www.business.wa.gov)) which provides a clear and easy way to navigate the online systems for state and local licensing, tax, and regulatory filings. The Business Portal initiative has already improved access to government services and regulatory functions by placing many routine business processes and necessary information in one spot. This approach helps ensure that businesses and environmental permit applicants can "get it right the first time" when they deal with government. In the longer term, the Business Portal will provide even more personalized and integrated services to save time and money for Washington businesses.

In 2006 the project successfully launched four releases on schedule. A fifth release is on schedule to launch June 21, 2007.

Today the website is:

- Easier to find with a new web address (URL), [www.business.wa.gov](http://www.business.wa.gov)
- Easier to navigate with:
  - Information reorganized into categories business people intuitively understand
  - Simplified and clarified language
  - Improved and established clear links to and from the websites of partner agencies
- And more comprehensive with:
  - Links to more online information and services provided by state and local agencies
  - New step-by-step instructions for starting a business
  - New interview capability to help business owners answer the question, "*Do I need to register with the state?*"
  - An improved online process to change an address with four state agency programs
  - Ability to apply online for the state's master business license and simultaneously apply for city business licenses in 12 cities
  - New information on business licenses and taxes in all 278 cities in Washington

The project team reached out to business leaders, organizations supporting businesses, and 22 state and local government agencies to gather input and save them time and effort. These outreach efforts are ongoing and the homepage of [www.business.wa.gov](http://www.business.wa.gov) now offers a short survey for users on the services provided by the portal so improvements can continue to be made.

# Enterprise Business Portal Initiative

## The Challenge

Businesses and individuals must interact with multiple agencies and jurisdictions to obtain licenses, permits, taxes, fees, or comply with other regulations in Washington State. While state and local agencies have invested in web presences to make their information and applications available, the multiplicity of portals, checklists and formats require businesses and individuals to go from site to site making it difficult to know with certainty when the process is complete. Updates to one agency don't get passed to others. Where local and state requirements overlap, businesses and individuals feel caught in the middle of rules that seem duplicative or conflicting.

Citizens and businesses have expressed the need for government to simplify and streamline Washington's regulation of business activity.

## The Solution

The Business Portal, ([www.business.wa.gov](http://www.business.wa.gov)) is a one-stop website that businesses and individuals can access to fulfill their licensing, permitting, regulatory, and tax collection requirements.

This website helps citizens and businesses navigate government processes by placing many single and multi-agency business functions in one, easy-to-navigate spot. The website features consolidated business licensing across multiple agencies and cities, and better assistance with environmental permitting. Further, the Business Portal simplifies many tasks, including tax reporting and payment.

Additional highlights include:

- Links to additional online information and services provided by state and local agencies
- Detailed information on starting or growing a business
- Step-by-step, "Question and Answer" style instructions for many licenses and permits
- Online reporting for changes in business information
- Licensing and tax information for every city (278) in Washington
- Resources for current and prospective business owners pointing them to laws and rules, training and counseling, and trade associations
- New interview capability to help business owners answer the question: "Do I need to register with the state?"
- An improved online process to change an address with four unique state agency programs
- 80% of Washington businesses can apply online through the state's master business license service and receive all state level business registrations. Simultaneously, businesses can receive city business licenses for 14 cities, with more to come.
- New information on business licenses and taxes for all 278 cities in Washington

## Hardware/software

The environment supporting the Business Portal consists of four DL 380 HP Proliant Servers, hardware load balanced by a Cisco Content Switching Module (CSM). The servers run Microsoft Windows 2003 and the web environment is Internet Information Server (IIS) 6.0 running .NET 2.0.

## Timing

The project was chartered in January 2006. The initial release went live in February 2006 making the first improvements to "Doing Business in Washington" available to the public on Access Washington™, the Official State Government Web Site. Improvements included a "Steps for Starting a Business" guide and enhanced connection with agencies.

In 2006 the project successfully launched four releases on schedule. A fifth release is scheduled for June 21, 2007.

## Benefits and Results

The Enterprise Business Portal Initiative is a key component of the Governor's Regulatory Improvement Program. Executive Order 06-02 spells out that a single, secure, online "portal" will be developed to make licensing, permitting, regulatory approvals or filings, and tax collection easier for businesses. The *Next Washington* plan supports Governor Gregoire's "Open for Business" approach to keeping Washington businesses competitive in the world by reducing barriers and improving efficiency. This multi-agency project provides, for the first time, a clear and easy way to navigate the online systems for state and local licensing, tax, and regulatory filings. Typically known as the *Business Portal*, the initiative improves access to government services and regulatory functions using single online tools. This approach helps ensure that business and environmental permit applicants can "get it right the first time" when they deal with state and local government. In the longer term, the *Business Portal* will provide even more personalized and integrated services to save time and money for Washington businesses.

Greater accuracy up front reduces rework and wasted time and effort for businesses and government agencies from that time forward. Furthermore, the Business Portal delivers government information and systems to businesses through a single location, reducing the need to access or know about multiple agencies or their systems.

Implementation and use of the *Business Portal* allows businesses to quickly and accurately navigate through state and local regulations, and puts them in touch with additional sources to help them compete from a position of strength in the local, regional, and global economies.

**Business.wa.gov** website provides businesses with:

- One place to find regulatory business processes they must routinely complete (saves businesses time and effort)
- Website brings information from 22 state and local agencies together in one place
- Detailed information on starting or growing a business
- Step-by-step, "Question and Answer" style instructions for many licenses and permits
- Online reporting for changes in business information
- Simultaneous state and city business license applications for 14 cities
- Licensing and tax information for all 278 cities in Washington
- Resources for current and prospective business owners pointing them to laws and rules, training and counseling, and trade associations
- Assistance with environmental permitting

The following table provides a monthly breakdown of the number of visitors to the Business Portal:

Month	Release	Visits to the Site	Task Satisfaction*	Role Satisfaction**
January 2006		44,846	No data	55
February 2006	<b>Release 1</b> on February 28, 2006	39,723	No data	No data
March 2006		52,863	No data	No data
April 2006		49,635	No data	No data
May 2006	<b>Release 2.1</b> on May 25, 2006	48,406	67	57
June 2006		47,766	65	59
July 2006		51,792	65	62
August 2006		50,414	71	61
September 2006		46,212	64	56
October 2006	<b>October Release (R2.2)</b> on October 12, 2006	55,597	70	67
November 2006	<b>November Release (R2.2 &amp; R2.3)</b> on November 30, 2006	52,481	66	60
December 2006		47,735	69	64

We believe businesses that use the Business Portal save time, reduce their effort, and increase their accuracy in agency compliance because information is collected in one place.

### Outreach

The Business Portal team created a communications and outreach plan to promote the Business Portal among the business community and increase adoption. According to the plan, the team:

- Developed a rack card to market the website to businesses (see PDF attachment);
- Developed a briefing paper to summarize what the website does, and which agencies are, involved with the effort
- The Business.Portal is incorporated as a resource for small businesses into Governor Gregoire's *Next Washington* Plan which outlines the Governor's 10-year economic vitality strategy. This plan is promoted widely throughout the state.
- Conducted 10 small business roundtable sessions during the past 12 months to understand what businesses need the Business.Portal to do. Contacts included:
  - 283 small businesses
  - 1,330 responses from small businesses to online survey of Business.wa.gov
  - 78 responses from small businesses rating the most important items for the website
  - 12 Chambers of Commerce
  - 8 business organizations
  - Approximately 25 potential or existing small businesses owners participated in usability testing prior to releasing improvements/enhancements to the website
- Conducted outreach to participating state agency customer support staff to increase awareness and visibility of the Business Portal for use during their normal activities as they support businesses.

The Business Portal is located at: [www.business.wa.gov](http://www.business.wa.gov)

The screenshot shows the 'Access Washington' website. At the top left is the logo and 'Official State Government Web Site'. Navigation links include 'Home | Help Center | Contact'. A search bar is on the top right with a 'Go!' button. A green navigation bar contains categories: 'Living in Washington', 'Working · Employment', 'Doing Business', 'Government', 'Education · Learning', and 'Visiting · Recreation'. Below this is a sub-menu: 'List of Agencies and Departments', 'Services A-Z', and 'State Facts'. The main content area is titled 'Doing Business in Washington' and features a photo of a woman at a fish market. A 'TAKE OUR SURVEY!' button is on the left. The main text lists several business-related topics with links to more information: 'Start a Business', 'Licenses, Permits and Inspections', 'Hire and Manage Employees', 'Taxes and Reports', 'Grow a Business', 'Change Business Status', and 'Do Business with the State'. A right-hand sidebar titled 'Doing Business in Washington' contains a 'How Do I?' section with a bulleted list of common business tasks.

**Access Washington™**  
Official State Government Web Site

Home | Help Center | Contact

Search:  **Go!**  
Search with Ask George™

Living in Washington | Working · Employment | **Doing Business** | Government | Education · Learning | Visiting · Recreation

List of Agencies and Departments | Services A-Z | State Facts

**Doing Business in Washington**

**Start a Business**  
Plan a business | Steps for starting a business | Find business registration requirements | ...More

**Licenses, Permits and Inspections**  
License your business or yourself | Check a business or license status | Get a permit or inspection | ...More

**Hire and Manage Employees**  
Find employees | Hire employees | Manage employees | ...More

**Taxes and Reports**  
State business taxes | File reports | Take advantage of tax incentives | ...More

**Grow a Business**  
Get grants and loans | Find market information | Take advantage of tax incentives | ...More

**Change Business Status**  
Change business structure | Change your address or update account information | Close your business | ...More

**Do Business with the State**  
Find bidding opportunities | Learn about special opportunities | Get prevailing wage information | ...More

**Resources**

**How Do I?**

- Find business registration requirements
- Start a business
- Find the minimum wage
- Pay taxes and file reports
- Look up a contractor, electrician or plumber
- Change my address or update account information

**More "How do I" topics**

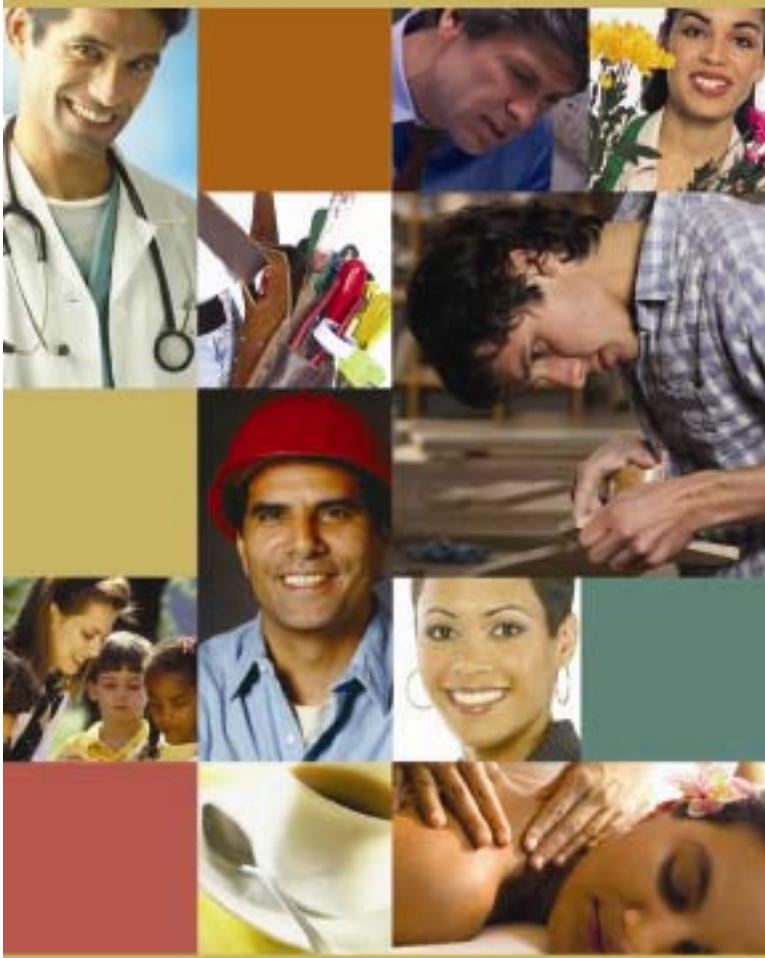
**TAKE OUR SURVEY!**  
[Answer a 10-question survey](#)

Printed Outreach Rack Card:

**Business.wa.gov**

# Plan Start Grow

A Business in Washington State



 **Access  
Washington**  
Official State Government Web Site