

Title: Nebraska Online Voter Registration
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Executive Summary

On September 22, 2015 the Nebraska Secretary of State Elections Division launched a bi-lingual, cross-agency application for online voter registration, coinciding with National Voter Registration Day.

Branded NEReg2Vote, the trendsetting interactive system securely retrieves, and then matches, the user's personal information from the Nebraska Department of Motor Vehicles, whose collaboration was critical. The application offers a simple interface for the eligible user to enter or update their voter information. Navigation demonstrations and voter FAQ's are available to assist first time and returning voters. Adoption is projected to surpass 15,000 users by this year's national election.
<http://www.nebraska.gov/demo/sos-voter-reg/one.html>

The Nebraska Online Voter Registration (NEReg2Vote) application elevates the use of best practices in a transformational way by addressing the Secretary of State (SOS) Elections Division's challenges inherent in the paper process for updating and/or registering to vote. Constraints which resulted from the paper process extended to: engaging citizens to update, receiving paper documents, manual review of these forms, inputting data manually then tracking documents which resulted in large amounts of manpower. These issues are now significantly reduced with the NEReg2Vote online application. The application allows the constituents to change their address, update their party affiliation or register for the first time by accessing the internet.

The NEReg2Vote application supports the Secretary of State's goals for increasing public engagement in the voter registration process by including:

- mobile device access
- greater accuracy and completeness of applications
- elimination of paper forms and mailing costs

This assists government officials in efficiently executing their duties as it:

- ends digital entry of data by county election officials for online registrations
- assures compliance with the state law which requires signatures on applications, by use of driver's license signatures of applicants
- includes helpful optional information from registrants to improve cross-checking and verification
- more immediate access by election officials to the new electronic registrations - compared to mailed applications

The NEReg2Vote application serves as a model to other agency projects as an example of cross agency collaboration. Partnering with the Secretary of State, the Department of Motor Vehicles, ES&S, (Electronic System and Software) and the Office of the Chief Information Officer; this multi-agency team has produced a cutting edge bi-lingual application to register or modify voter registration for all Nebraskan constituents. The application works in tandem with the paper process to register the citizens of Nebraska and prepare them for the voting process.

Concept

The Nebraska Online Voter Registration is the state's first online access to voter registration. The genesis of the project began after successfully winning the contract from the Secretary of State during the RFP process. The NEReg2Vote has shown significant use since its launch in September of 2015. Previous to this application the only option a voter had to modify their voter registration was with a paper process which inconvenienced voters and was a hindrance for full constituent engagement. However now whether a citizen wants to register for the first time, find their polling place, change their address, declare a party affiliation or update their name, the NEReg2Vote allows editing as many times as the user wishes, providing complete freedom to modify information from anywhere an internet connection is present. Comprehensive and easy

to use, removing barriers for up to date voter information, all constituents are able to update their voter information in a safe and secure environment. Nebraska Interactive participates in the Verizon Enterprise Solutions Security Management Program to assure security and risk management. The application is Section 508 compliant. Privacy is paramount and requires users must know their driver license number, first and last name, and date of birth to perform the validation.

Funding the NEReg2Vote application was obtained through the RFP process released by the Secretary of State as an online solution to increase access to voter registration information for the constituents. The resulting win provided the time and materials budget to build the online application. Collaboration with interagency teams included the Secretary of State, Department of Motor Vehicles, ES&S (Electronic System and Software) and the Office of Chief Information Officer. Communication required bi-weekly project meetings to assure all stakeholders involved were making the necessary modifications to accommodate this joint usage system. Using the waterfall project management method, the project was completed in a sequential design process through concept, initiation, analysis, design, construction, testing and production, implementation and maintenance. Collaboration between each agency's service and or database system was critical to achieve the validation and authentication process required in the NEReg2Vote application.

Costing 459.25 hours of project management, production and development time, longer than the projected 412.00 hours estimated, NEReg2Vote has been touted vigorously by the Nebraska Secretary of State as a monumental success. This time translates to minor investment of \$57,593.94 for the entire voting population of the state to have access to their voter registration information online any time, day or night.

Proximity to a state election office can range widely for Nebraskan constituents. This can translate to a significant time investment if distance is an issue. With online registration there is no need to take time out of a busy day, as accessing voter registration from work, home or a mobile device provides that convenience. In addition to travel expenses, hours missed from work, potentially docked pay, childcare expenses all stack up to discourage voters from updating. Costs in time and money may hinder the participation of the voter to update relevant information and can result in non-participation when weighed against the costs. The mobile responsive design alleviates this conundrum allowing rural and urban, single or with family Nebraskans to update or register to vote from an internet connection at the best time for them.

To promote awareness and educate users the Secretary of State's marketing department in collaboration with Nebraska Interactive produced numerous marketing initiatives. Local media venues used were press releases to inform local media, various online newspapers, klnetv.com, journalstar.com and Omaha.com to name a few. National channels also circulated articles including abcnews.com, washingtonmonthly.com, marketwatch.com spreading the word about NEReg2Vote. Social media posts on Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn and Google+ were utilized and continue to be initiated by both SOS and Nebraska Interactive on a bi-monthly basis

during this election season. Print materials have been placed strategically in public buildings, such as libraries and meeting halls, in addition to cross agency locations for maximum exposure.

Significance

Those benefitting from the NEReg2Vote are the 1,314,620 Nebraskans currently of voting age. The impact was impressive within the first 24 hours of launching the application received 870 submissions with consistent adoption exceeding 32,000 visitors since kick off in September 2015 creating a notable impact on the Elections division. The very definition of success, in comparison to state's like Hawaii and Massachusetts, response to the application continues to be enthusiastic, which is remarkable given that Nebraska's population is considerably smaller than those states studied. The public education sector has reported that teachers are accessing NEReg2Vote in their classrooms to register students who meet the statutory age requirement. In this digital age where young adults are raised with computers, tablets and other mobile devices it's appropriate to assume that they would be more likely to log onto a website or use an app to register to vote as opposed to visiting a physical office changing the way constituents interact with state government forever. Making use of that assumption, Nebraska teachers are taking full advantage to activate young voters even before they leave high school and place them on the road to civic engagement.

The Nebraska State Election Division prioritized its business process goals in 2015 to eliminate as much of the paper processing required for voter registration. Since launching they have reaped the benefits of those goals in the form of: reducing data entry errors, decreasing costs associated with postage, improving transmission time of voter registrations to county offices and streamlining the overall process. Since it is accessible 24/7 and mobile-friendly, NEReg2Vote ensures that citizens can register or update their voter registration anytime, anywhere. This greatly increases convenience and voter engagement and expedites all processes within the department.

To address legacy modernization, the NEReg2Vote application was developed in responsive design for any mobile platform using the innovative Nebraska Interactive Common Application Template (CAT). The NEReg2Vote application is nested in a clustered environment maintaining multiple servers running as back up. These are kept remotely from each other, guaranteeing 24/7/365 site reliability to align with the CIO strategic plan for constant accessibility.

In effort to consolidate and optimize resources, the mulit-agency team worked to create a technologically savvy application. In the NEReg2Vote app the user inputs their identification data which is then authenticated against the DMV database via a REST-based web service. Once the voter's identity is confirmed by the authentication process their registration data is submitted to the SOS's voter information database via an encrypted communication channel to a SOAP-based web service hosted by ES&S.

Impact

With busy schedules, updating one's voter information is not typically a priority for a constituent, however critical if one is to be voter ready. Additionally, the paper process which required a download, print, and mail or delivery in person, caused inconvenience and was considered a major stumbling block to this process. Prior to online registration, this tedious process was the norm for Nebraska voters. Finding time to perform first time voter registration or updates could be prohibitive and lead to voter apathy. Overcoming a lack of engagement, facilitating readiness to vote, and removing obstacles which prevent a citizen's voter preparation, were the goals of the NEReg2Vote online application.

For the Secretary of State Elections Division, challenges ranged from receiving paper documents, reviewing these forms, inputting data by hand and tracking documents. These issues required man hours now significantly reduced with the advent of NEReg2Vote. A change of address, update of a party affiliation or first time registration are as easy as accessing the internet. Once in the application a voter simply enters their information into the fields from the convenience of a home computer or mobile device. Once entered and submitted the information is passed to a system that stores the information to be retrieved and reviewed by the county election offices reducing the need for manual data entry.

NEReg2Vote is a bi-lingual application for all Spanish and English speaking Nebraskans to access a user friendly, responsive design application. Inclusion was a top priority for the Elections Division. Programming the two most predominate languages in the state makes all citizens ready to vote. The application is prepared to include further languages when deemed appropriate.

Who benefits? From the inception of the NEReg2vote the focus has been on citizen engagement. The key benefits specifically earmarked included any and all steps to modify voting information from any location where an internet connection can be found. Mobile friendly was priority one, to assure a constant stream of access 24/7/365. With the upcoming presidential election in November the Secretary of State's office demanded Nebraska citizens have all impediments removed from the voting registration process. User feedback has mentioned the user-friendly UI. Compatibility with the text reading software has also been noted as a benefit appreciated by the constituents. Secondary benefits have been appreciated in the office of the Elections Division with less need for data input from the staff members. This results in a lower incidence of human error and increased efficiencies.

As ancient and inherent as human dignity itself, wielding the right to vote and employing the ability to voice an opinion and exercising control over one's own destiny has been a right won by few and sought by many. Research shows that once stripped of the right to cast their vote prisoner rates of recidivism increases. Once restored it decreases even

when the outcome of the election doesn't result in the outcome of their vote. Understanding how critical this human need is to be counted, Nebraska government has found a solution to allow for ease of access to a citizen's right to vote.