



NASCIO 2016 Recognition Awards Nomination

FACTS for Accountability and Transparency

State of Florida

**Agency for State Technology
&
Department of Financial Services**

Category: Open Government & Data

Project Initiation Date: November 2011

Project Completion Date: August 2014

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Executive Summary

The Florida Department of Financial Services' (DFS) Florida Accountability Contract Tracking System (FACTS) is a nationally recognized comprehensive online tool that offers Floridians greater visibility into how their government is doing business. FACTS makes state contracting processes transparent through a centralized, statewide contract reporting website. The website contains images, financial information, and audit findings of all grant and contract documents from participating agencies using a user-friendly query tool.

FACTS is the cornerstone of one of Chief Financial Officer (CFO) Jeff Atwater's transparency initiatives – to empower Floridians to see at “the click of a mouse” how their government is spending their tax dollars. FACTS makes grant awards, contracts, settlement agreements, purchase orders, contract documents, contract audits and other types of contract documentation more accessible to the public through an easily searchable and downloadable user-friendly website.

FACTS provides valuable contract and expenditure information to a wide range of stakeholders. State entities use the website to view other agencies' contracts to ensure their own contracts are competitively priced, as well as to identify and leverage possible collaborative contracting opportunities. Private businesses use the website to view relevant contracts to see if they can provide a better value at a lower cost to the state. Citizens, experts, and other groups use the website to download and analyze contract information for research purposes and to also serve as watchdogs over the spending of taxpayer money.

FACTS was developed through a collaborative interdepartmental partnership between DFS' information technology division and the state's accounting and auditing business unit. FACTS receives daily updates from data already entered into both the state's accounting system (Florida Accounting Information Resource [FLAIR]) and the state's purchasing system (MyFloridaMarketPlace, [MFMP]), saving agencies time and resources.

Concept

During the 2011 Legislative Session, the Florida Legislature solidified its commitment to transparency and agency contract reporting by creating the “Transparency Florida Act” (section 215.985, Florida Statutes), championed by CFO Atwater, which required public access to a state contract management website.

Using information systems development methodology (ISDM) best practices, the FACTS project included joint application development sessions with key stakeholders to determine business needs, scope, and requirements. Appreciating the critical importance of end-user training, DFS initiated a highly successful robust education and training program designed to assist all participating agencies with effectively entering, verifying, and, retrieving information using FACTS.

The FACTS project started in the fall of 2011, with the last phase delivered in the summer of 2014. DFS took advantage of existing technology and skills already available to the department to successfully design, develop, and deploy the website. Because this project required the majority of participating agencies to initially scan and upload hundreds of thousands of existing contract documents, in addition to manually entering pertinent contract information, DFS was cognizant and mindful of the significant impact this project would have on participating agency resources. To accommodate agencies that already maintained their contract data electronically, DFS designed a batch import capability to interface with FACTS so agencies could provide their contracting data electronically, in lieu of manually entering the data. To further assist the agencies, the project was divided into six releases, which helped the agencies manage their workload by providing a predictable and workable schedule.

Release 1: Provided the ability to enter/search contracts

Release 2: Added payments to the website

Release 3: Added auditing results to the website

Release 4: Added contract documents to the website

Release 5: Added purchase orders to the website

Release 6: Added grant awards to the website

Figure 1 - Main FACTS search page

The screenshot shows the main search interface for the Florida Accountability Contract Tracking System (FACTS). It includes a header with the agency logo and navigation links for Home, News, About the Agency, and Meet the CFO. Below the header is a top navigation bar with links for Main Search, FAQ, Contact Us, Message, Charts, Transparency, and Florida. A social media sharing bar for Twitter, Google+, and Facebook is also present. The main search area is titled "Main Search" and contains fields for "Agency Name" (dropdown: ALL AGENCIES), "Vendor/Grantor Name" (text input), "Dollar Value" (date range from/to inputs), "Beginning and/or Ending Dates (mm/dd/yyyy)" (date range inputs), "Commodity/Service Type" (dropdown: ALL COMMODITY GROUPS), and search options ("Show All", "Show Contracts Only", "Show Grant Awards Only", "Show Purchase Orders Only"). There are also fields for "Agency Assigned Contract ID (if known)", "Grant Award ID (if known)", and "MFMP PO Number (if known)". A note at the bottom states "By using this Search you agree to [terms and conditions](#) of the Search." At the bottom right are "Reset" and "Search" buttons.

Figure 2 - Advanced Search Page

The screenshot shows the advanced search interface for the FACTS system. It features a similar header and navigation bar as the main search page. The main search area is titled "Advanced Search" and includes all the fields from the main search plus additional filters. These include "Minority Vendor Designation" (dropdown: ALL MINORITY VENDOR DESIGNATIONS, listing African-American, Certified; African-American, Non Certified; Asian-American, Certified; Asian-American, Non Certified), "Fiscal Year of Execution" (dropdown), and "Method of Procurement" (checkbox: Show Inactive (Contract & Purchase Order Only), dropdown: ALL METHOD OF PROCUREMENTS, listing various agency invitation types). At the bottom left are checkboxes for "Show All", "Show Contracts Only", "Show Grant Awards Only", and "Show Purchase Orders Only". At the bottom right is a "Contract Specific Search Parameters" link and an "Expand All" button.

The annual cost to operate and maintain the FACTS application remains consistent with the most recent fiscal year operating cost totaling \$421,978. The FACTS home page is located at: <http://www.myfloridacfo.com/division/AA/FAC TSReporting/default.htm>.

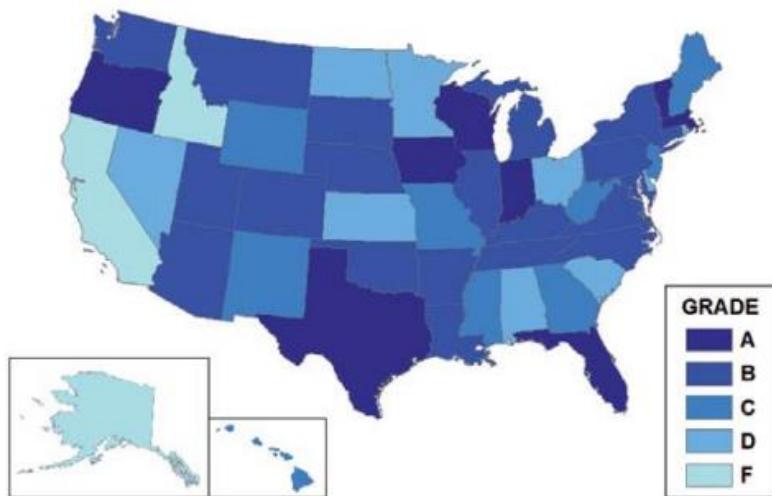
Significance

In 2012, nearly \$50 billion, or approximately 56 percent of the state budget, was spent on contracts and agreements for goods and services. With the release of FACTS, for the first time, these contracts and agreements are available online for anyone to search and download. This level of transparency was one of CFO Atwater's prime objectives upon taking office, and is a clear focus of modern government at all levels. Private businesses are able to view contracts and find areas where they believe they can offer the state a better value. State entities can use the website to ensure their own contracts are competitively priced, as well as to view other agencies' contracts to identify and leverage possible collaborative contracting opportunities. The public can serve as watchdogs for the state to ensure everyone's tax dollars are being well spent. Elected leaders can ensure higher levels of efficiency and accountability.

FACTS is a nationally recognized transparency website. The implementation of FACTS was the primary driver behind Florida earning an "A" grade by U.S. Public Interest Research Group (PIRG) for state transparency initiatives. PIRG's "Following the Money 2014" report listed Florida as one of only eight states receiving an "A" for that reporting year.

Figure 3 – How the 50 States Rate in Providing Online Access to Government Spending Data

Figure ES-1: How the 50 States Rate in Providing Online Access to Government Spending Data



http://www.uspirg.org/sites/pirg/files/reports/Following%20the%20Money%20vUS%20v2_0.pdf

The PIRG report highlighted FACTS' robust user-friendly functionality, including the ability to allow ordinary citizens, experts, and watchdog groups to download and analyze contract information on any array of expenditures. Also emphasized in the report was the increase in competition partially resulting from the launch of Florida's FACTS website, which allowed the state to re-procure and re-negotiate contracts at lower costs, saving \$3.2 million between October 2012 and June 2013.

FACTS also addresses several National Association of State Chief Information Officers (NASCIO 2016) priorities including Consolidation/Optimization, Business Intelligence and Data Analytics, Legacy Modernization, Budget and Cost Control and Agile and Incremental Software Delivery.

Impact

The FACTS transparency website increased the visibility of contracts awarded by state agencies, by allowing users to search for state contracts by state agency, vendor, dollar amount cost, data and commodity or service type. Search results are available in a downloadable format as well as in a detailed information page that also lists contract deliverables. As each contract expires, the state anticipates an increase in competition due to the public and vendor communities' awareness of the types of work and services and historical costs associated with current and past contracts. Since FY 2013-14, it is estimated that Florida realized \$40 million dollars in cost savings from the renegotiation of existing contracts and better initial negotiation of new contracts.

FACTS became the point of entry for contracts and grants replacing the functionality previously offered by the mainframe based FLAIR system. Compared to the legacy FLAIR system, FACTS significantly increased the amount of contract data that is now captured and made available to the public.

FACTS also facilitated the decommissioning of an external system maintained by the Florida Department of Management Services (DMS). As FACTS is now the primary source for state purchase orders, DMS no longer needed to offer/maintain that functionality.

FACTS also includes a Contract Auditing System (CAS) module used by internal DFS auditors to help ensure contracts and agreements conform to state standards. As of 2014, more than two-thirds of Florida's state agencies improved their deficiency rate, attributed in part to the fact that FACTS' transparency incentivized agencies to write better contracts. The 2014 audit of state contracts also revealed a 14 percent improvement in state contract accountability.

In closing, the FACTS team fulfilled one of CFO Atwater's top initiatives by being a flagship of transparency in the state of Florida. FACTS is a model of how government

can come together to create solutions that have a positive and significant impact for both government and the people.