

Electronic Filing System (EFS)

<http://apps.oregon.gov/OGEC/EFS>

Oregon Government Ethics Commission

Category: Improving Government Operations

Project Initiation: August 21, 2014

Project Completion: September 30, 2015

Sponsor

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Executive Summary

The Oregon Government Ethics Commission (GEC) Electronic Filing System (EFS) was developed in response to Oregon Revised Statutes (ORS) 244.290(5) and (6), and ORS 171.772(4), (5), and (6), and the Governor's direction to increase transparency of the required registration and reports of lobbyists and public officials. The system transforms an entirely manual paper based process into an efficient, real-time online system. The EFS facilitates simple online filing of Lobbying Registrations, Public Official Statements of Economic Interest (SEI), Quarterly Reporting of Lobbyists, Lobbyist clients, Legal Expense Trust Funds, and makes such filings available online to the public.

Creation of this EFS leveraged usability testing with legislators, lobbyists, and other stakeholders to ensure ease of use and support immediate adoption. This testing revealed opportunities to improve language, layout, and the information collected, resulting in a significantly more user-friendly system.

The Electronic Filing System (EFS) provides the following improvements:

- Enhanced online access to these public records drastically improved public transparency to real-time information, previously available only in person;
- Reduced time, effort, and cost for Public Officials, Lobbyists, and Lobbyist Employers/Clients to file their respective registrations, expenditure reports and statements of economic interest, increased timely filings and compliance;
- Eliminated the costs and delays inherent in the paper based process;
- Improved management tools enabled the GEC staff to better facilitate the process and drastically reduce processing time;
- Re-allocated roughly 1,200 hours of the GEC staff time from annual processing tasks to higher impact activities, such as auditing the filings;
- Saved more than 6,100 hours across all filers, collectively;
- \$14k expected annual savings from GEC's printing, mailing, and storage costs;
- \$8k expected savings in filers' mailing costs annually.

The Electronic Filing System (EFS) has risen to meet the Governor's task of increasing the transparency of ethics laws compliance, and provides real-time access to this data and information for members of the public.

Project Narrative

Concept

Background: The Oregon Government Ethics Commission (GEC) is tasked with ensuring accountability of public officials, candidates, lobbyists, lobbyists' clients, and legal expense trust funds, to the public through Oregon's government ethics and disclosure laws. These laws prohibit public officials from using office for financial gain, and requires public disclosure of economic conflicts of interest. Furthermore, the laws require lobbyists and the entities they represent to register and report their expenditures.

Process: The GEC facilitates, processes, and makes available to the public over 16,000 filings of statements of economic interest, lobbying registrations, lobbying expenditures, and legal expense trust fund donations and expenditures each year. This process has historically been a manual process conducted via mail and hardcopy forms. As a result, all such public records only existed in physical, hardcopy form, and required the public to visit the GEC office to view the record details, or request (and pay for) copies to be made and delivered for inspection.

As with any manual process, this resulted in unnecessary costs, delays, inefficiencies, and greater exposure to human error, as well as the creation of barriers to accessing the information otherwise intended to promote government transparency.

Oregon Revised Statutes (ORS) 244.290(5) and (6), and ORS 171.772(4), (5), and (6), directed the GEC to implement an electronic filing system to facilitate the filing of Lobbying Registrations, Public Official Statements of Economic Interest (SEI), Quarterly Reporting of Lobbyists, Lobbyist Clients, and Legal Expense Trust Funds, as well as make such filings available for public inspection online by January 1, 2016. These requirements were met through the project completion date of September 30, 2015.

Selection Process: Four general development and implementation approaches were considered. Of these four, two were identified as most viable given the timeframe, availability of resources, perceived risks, and cost considerations. The GEC elected to utilize the State's enterprise E-Government Program to develop and implement the new system working closely through a public-private partnership, where the private partner had successfully delivered a similar solution for another state. The E-Government Program also provides security safeguards in that their entire infrastructure and development processes undergo an independent security audit every year.

Costs: Overall costs include one full time project manager, one and a half staff subject matter experts, and staff trainers. The system was developed utilizing an innovative annual software subscription fee which helped protect the state of Oregon from traditionally risky time and materials based approaches. The ongoing annual software subscription fee is \$63,500.

Project Management and Oversight: The GEC and NIC project managers met weekly; monthly reports were prepared and presented to the GEC and E-Government Program management and stakeholders; the GEC commission received updates at their meeting, and quarterly status reports were given to the Oregon CIO, CFO, and members of the E-Government Program staff.

Accessibility: Throughout development, accessibility was considered and ensured by conducting iterative accessibility testing and validation in production.

Communication: An extensive user education and awareness campaign was launched and included in person training sessions, on-demand video tutorials, email, and mailed notices of the new system's availability. All users are now required to file online which supports a 100% adoption rate. Here is the link to EFS instructional videos:

<http://www.oregon.gov/OGEC/Pages/training.aspx>.

Significance

The Electronic Filing System (EFS) increases efficiency and transparency by providing online filing of required registrations, statements, reports, automated reminders that increase likelihood of timely filing, online staff review and management, and instant free access to public information.

The EFS system leveraged stakeholder usability testing to both promote the new system and solicit feedback throughout design and development. By watching actual users navigate the system during tests, the team was able to adapt and improve usability before launching the system for public use.

By integrating email notifications into the system, registered users are now automatically notified of upcoming filing requirements, deadlines, and any delinquent status. This functionality gives the system's users every opportunity to meet state filing requirements by the associated deadlines. By proactively and automatically communicating, this system removes a common public frustration of confusing requirements and deadlines.

The Electronic Filing System (EFS) also meets the following 2016 NASCIO priorities:

Consolidation/Optimization: Building the EFS through the Oregon CIO's E-Government Program, this initiative leverages an enterprise service provider through a public/private partnership, and statewide resources.

Data Management: The EFS consolidates and digitizes valuable data that enables the agency to operate more accurately and efficiently, and makes the data instantly accessible to the public.

Impact

Since the launch of the Oregon Government Ethics Commission EFS:

- 4563 public officials are registered as seat holders;
- 842 Lobbyists registered 921 clients;
- 4320 Statements of Economic Interest have been filed;
- 832 client quarterly reports have been filed;
- 739 lobbyist quarterly reports have been filed.

Automatic sanctions will begin accruing in May 2016, which will also represents a time savings for the GEC staff, in that daily accruals for late filings will automatically be calculated and the delinquent filers notified. Start and end dates for accruals will occur automatically per the status of their online filing. Previously, this process was very manual and prone to calculation errors and discrepancies in the date filings were received. The EFS automates this process, encouraging compliance and assessing penalties automatically.

Legislators have reported using the EFS public search tools during session. After meeting a new person, they were able to easily look up any lobbying affiliations or clients, to have a better perspective on potential individual motivations. This kind of real-time information would not have been possible prior to the EFS.

The Oregon Government Ethics Commission (GEC) is seeing more timely submissions of reports due to the automated notifications and filing reminders. Using the online forms and field validation, reports submitted are now more complete and provide a cost and time savings.

The role of the Ethics Commission has been elevated in statewide visibility after an ethics scandal that resulted in the Governor stepping down from office in early 2015. The new Governor has placed increased scrutiny on Ethics laws and the Commission's oversight of those laws, in an effort to increase transparency.

The Electronic Filing System (EFS) has provided the platform that makes the required transparency possible. By moving an entirely paper based process online, public officials, lobbyists, and lobbyist clients are now able to submit their registrations and reporting requirements more efficiently and completely, and the system provides real-time access to this data for members of the public. Overall, the Electronic Filing System (EFS) has risen to the Governor's task of increasing the transparency of ethics laws compliance.