



NASCIO 2017 State IT Recognition Awards Nomination

Florida Unique Abilities Partner Program

State of Florida
Agency for State Technology
&
Department of Economic Opportunity

Category: Government to Business

Project Initiation Date: June 2016

Project Completion Date: October 2016

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Executive Summary

In 2016, Florida House Bill 7003 mandated the Florida Department of Economic Opportunity (DEO) to create and manage the Florida Unique Abilities Partner Program (FUAPP), which is a part of a larger initiative under the Employment First Act designed to prioritize the employment of individuals with disabilities and to change the employment system to better integrate these individuals into the workforce.

The purpose of the FUAPP initiative was to enable business entities to be designated as Florida Unique Abilities Partners by demonstrating commitment, through employment or support, to the independence of individuals who have a disability. The project's primary objectives were to create a website and accompanying database by which the public could submit applications and provide documentation regarding their eligibility to be considered a Florida Unique Ability Partner.

The FUAPP project aligned perfectly with the goals and priorities of DEO because it assists in strengthening Florida's economy and workforce by providing a talented but untapped group of Floridians who want to work more opportunities to do so. Since unemployment rates for those with disabilities is higher than the general population, it is easy to understand how disabilities can be viewed as barriers to employment. Private-sector companies and state agencies can participate in FUAPP and proudly display their commitment to individuals with unique abilities and demonstrate their dedication to individuals with disabilities by turning barriers to employment into the recognition that Floridians with untapped talents can strengthen the state's workforce.

From a technological standpoint, FUAPP represented an opportunity to utilize an emerging technology in Salesforce's Platform as a Service (PaaS). A primary objective of the project was to determine the viability of using the Salesforce platform as the department's primary application development platform and, if viable, designating the Salesforce platform as one of DEO IT's standard operating environments. Developing applications on the Salesforce platform represents a fundamental change in how applications are developed and maintained, so a successful development cycle using the platform could pave the way for DEO and other state agencies to consider the Salesforce development platform as the primary tool by which state applications are developed and supported.

As of April 19, 2017, 103 organizations have submitted applications to be Florida Unique Ability Partners and have been approved. Additional applications have been submitted in the system and are pending approval. Additionally, the Unique Ability website has been viewed over 30,000 times since its late October release. Based on the lessons learned from the FUAPP project, DEO IT plans to utilize the Salesforce platform for future application development and rewrite efforts, which should result in reduced application maintenance/support costs and establish a standard environment for DEO IT application developers.

Concept

In 2016, Florida House Bill 7003 mandated the Florida Department of Economic Opportunity (DEO) to create and manage the Florida Unique Abilities Partner Program (FUAPP). In response to the FUAPP requirements, DEO created a project designed to define, develop, and deploy a database and website to enable private and public organizations to submit applications and provide documentation regarding their eligibility based on program criteria. The website was designed to create a resource for program partners as well as provide a list of the program's participating partners. Finally, the project scope included the creation of a formal marketing campaign for the launch and promotion of the program in addition to the official program website.

The program initiative included stakeholders from the DEO Division of Workforce Services, the DEO Office of Communications & External Affairs, the DEO Office of Legislative & Cabinet Affairs, the DEO Executive Leadership group, and the DEO Information Technology (DEO IT) group. The business unit staff was heavily involved in the functional requirements as well as ensuring that the program outcomes met the legislative requirements while the communications staff and executive leadership team led the department's marketing and promotional efforts for the program's launch.

The DEO IT group established a formal project to establish FUAPP and provide project management, business analysis, and technical consultation to the department. The scope of the technical project was defined by the legislative requirements included in the Florida House Bill 7003, which are as follows:

- Creation of workflow for approval and rejection process
- Creation and ongoing maintenance of FUAPP application, website, and supporting database, which would launch from www.floridajobs.org and include eligibility requirements, method of application or nomination, and best practices to facilitate the inclusion of disabled individuals
- Web design must be 508 compliant
- Creation of online and print application and nomination forms with attachment upload function for submitting supporting documentation
- Application form must capture business identification information, including business name, business address, business contact information, county, and region
- Nomination form must capture business name, address, and contact information
- Creation of database to store applications and nominations
- Creation of backend administrator view for application and nomination management by the Division of Workforce Services
- Creation of searchable FUAPP-designated partners list on FUAPP website
- Creation of FUAPP reports including annual program statistics and quarterly-updated partner lists

- Modifications to Employ Florida Marketplace job listings to include recognition of FUAPP-designated partners
- Creation of FUAPP logo, available in various downloadable formats, and marketing guidelines
- List of links to program partners and websites of organizations or other resources to help potential partners employ or support individuals with disabilities
- Status report on progress of implementation to be sent to the Governor, President of the Senate, and Speaker of the House of Representatives by 1/1/2017.

At the beginning of the initiative, the DEO IT group identified two possible options for addressing and satisfying the project requirements: a .NET codebase solution and a Salesforce codebase solution. The .NET solution aligned with previous application development methodologies within the department, but assumed the typical issues and risks associated with the method of development, specifically the effort required to maintain and modify the system. The Salesforce solution presented the DEO IT group with an opportunity to leverage an emerging technology which would allow for a truncated development cycle, create a standardized operating environment for future development efforts, and result in a minimal level of effort required from the DEO IT staff regarding the maintenance of the applications. To minimize the risks inherent with new and emerging technologies, the project team decided to move forward with the DEO IT development staff writing both the .NET and Salesforce databases concurrently, with the objective being to utilize the Salesforce option as the permanent solution. After a review of the completed Salesforce development option, the decision was made to move forward with Salesforce as the designated solution for this project as well as future application builds and re-writes.

The project resources for the DEO IT group included application development, project management, database administration, security, and architecture staff. The total estimated effort for the DEO IT group for the project was projected as 780 hours, 660 of which were projected for a team of five application developers, a business analyst and a project manager. The project management methodology generally followed the PMI PMBOK methods and an internal DEO IT project management tool was utilized to track and manage the project schedule. The project's risks and assumptions were documented at the outset of the project and the DEO IT security and enterprise architecture teams were involved throughout the project to ensure that risks were effectively mitigated or addressed.

The Salesforce application and accompanying database was completed in early October 2016 and the UAT period was completed shortly after. DEO's Executive Director, Cissy Proctor, announced the official launch of the Florida Unique Abilities Partner Program on October 26, 2016.

Significance

The Florida Unique Abilities Partner Program serves as a critical component to encouraging private and public sector organizations to prioritize the employment of and provide employment opportunities to those Floridians with disabilities which will strengthen the state's workforce and reduce the state's unemployment rate. For the companies and organizations that become Partners in the program, they will be proudly displaying their commitment to individuals with unique abilities and will be sending a strong message of social responsibility to their communities and current, as well as prospective, customers. The program's primary goal is to serve as a method to encourage private and public sector organizations to participate in focusing on this untapped group of Floridians as a resource for the state's workforce.

From an agency perspective, the FUAPP project enabled the DEO IT group to assess and determine the viability of the Salesforce platform as a standard operating environment for application development. The benefits of the Salesforce platform include a shortened development lifecycle, multiple methods of application development, pre-built applications and software programs, and a significant reduction in the time and effort required by department personnel to support and maintain applications on the platform. Based on the lessons learned from the FUAPP project, DEO IT plans to utilize the Salesforce platform for future application development and rewrite efforts, which should result in reduced application maintenance/support costs and establish a standard environment for DEO IT application developers.

Impact

From an agency perspective, the FUAPP project enabled the DEO IT group to assess and determine the viability of the Salesforce platform as a standard operating environment for application development. The benefits of the Salesforce platform include a shortened development lifecycle, multiple methods of application development, pre-built applications and software programs, and a significant decline in the time and effort required by department personnel to support and maintain applications on the platform. Based on the lessons learned from the FUAPP project, DEO IT plans to utilize the Salesforce platform for future application development and rewrite efforts, which should result in reduced application maintenance and support costs and establish a standard environment for DEO IT application developers.

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