



# Arkansas Online Appointment Scheduler

Digital Services: Government to Citizen

Arkansas

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# Executive Summary

## **Include:**

*How does the project represent visionary and transformational use of information technology in state government?*

The COVID-19 pandemic has underscored the importance of improving the quality and efficiency of government services to better meet the needs of citizens, and put Arkansas Governor Asa Hutchinson's transformation initiative into high-gear as agencies worked to offer online solutions to in-person problems as the crisis unfolded across the globe.

Recognizing the urgent need to accommodate citizens for in-person appointments while controlling foot traffic and dramatically reducing wait times, the Arkansas Department of Public Safety (DPS), the Arkansas Department of Human Services (DHS), and the Arkansas Department of Corrections (DOC) leveraged an online appointment scheduling platform to better prepare for and manage the volume of citizens using their services while taking the necessary precautions to maintain social distancing guidelines.

Working with the state's digital government services provider, NIC (a division of Tyler Technologies), DPS, DHS, and DOC adapted NIC's TeleGov Scheduling Platform to centralize appointment management for services that would normally require a long, in-person wait. An intuitive and secure scheduling tool designed for government, TeleGov features back-office and front-end tools to manage inbound government agency foot traffic and workflows. This multi-tenant, scalable platform offers turnkey solutions designed to support every state, city, county and municipality as they return to in-person services.

Prior to the launch of DPS's online appointment scheduling platform, Arkansas drivers wanting to take the driver skills test would have to visit a testing site location and wait in line to take the test. Now applicants can visit <https://telegov.egov.com/aspdlskills> and select from over 84 testing locations to make a testing appointment. Applicants receive appointment confirmations via email, saving on average two hours of testing time per applicant and avoiding the possibility of being turned away due to unexpected volume at a testing location and impending closing hours. Not only does this improve the experience for those wanting to take the exam, but also allows DPS to better prepare and manage the volume of applicants in each of its field offices and take the necessary precautions to maintain social distancing guidelines.

Since DPS launched the online appointment scheduler in January 2020, more than 51,500 appointments have been created online, saving applicants a collective 103,000 hours that would have been spent standing in line to take the driver skills exam.

Likewise, the Arkansas Department of Human Services' online appointment scheduler offers childcare workers and child welfare applicants (foster and adoptive parents) the ability to make an appointment for their fingerprint scan online from their mobile device or computer, eliminating the need to stand in line for the service. Applicants can visit <https://telegov.egov.com/dhsfingerprint> and select from 53 local county office locations where background check fingerprinting appointments can be scheduled online. Appointment confirmations are sent to the applicants via email or text. Since June 1, 2020 nearly 17,600 appointments have been made.

Due to the COVID-19 public health emergency, Arkansas Department of Corrections (DOC) in-person visitation rules and procedures have been significantly modified to prevent the spread of the coronavirus. In

December 2020, DOC launched a pilot program for modified in-person visitation using the TeleGov appointment scheduling platform at four locations. On March 6, 2021 the program was expanded to include six more facilities.

Visitors to DOC facilities can go to <https://telegov.egov.com/docrequest> to request a visitation to one of the ten facilities around the state for a specified date and time. DOC staff then review the request. To date, over 375 visitations have been scheduled online.

## Concept

### **Include:**

*Describe the solution architecture of the project: 1) Is the initiative part of a larger project 2) What project management approach was taken? 3) What are the costs involved 4) How is it assessed? 5) What efforts are made to ensure accessibility and information security? 6) To what extent is the state responsible for oversight of the initiative? 7) Describe the communications plan to raise awareness.*

In October 2018, Arkansas Governor Asa Hutchinson initiated statewide digital government transformation efforts in Arkansas state government to improve efficiency and facilitate greater use of online services. Developed with this in mind, the concept of providing online appointment scheduling for Arkansas state government in-person services began to take shape in November 2019 as the Arkansas Department of Public Safety (DPS) looked for ways to improve the existing capabilities of their testing operations and remove the barriers created by manual, paper-based processes.

With over 3,400 monthly applicants, DPS contended with fluctuating and often heavy foot traffic to testing site locations. DPS was looking for a virtual appointment scheduling tool that would accommodate citizens for in-person appointments while controlling foot traffic and dramatically reducing wait times.

Over the next few months DPS worked with NIC Arkansas (NIC AR) via a waterfall methodology to develop a custom appointment scheduling service dubbed, "In Line Online." Developed at no cost to DPS, In Line Online launched on January 6, 2020. An immediate success, the site received nearly 5,000 visitors within the first month alone. Unprecedented in Arkansas state government, this advance appointment feature eliminated the need to wait in line for a spot to take the exam and avoided the risk of being turned away due to unexpected volume at a testing location.

Fast forward to the summer of 2020, NIC Arkansas's project manager pitched the online scheduling service to the Arkansas Department of Human Services (DHS) during a meeting about improving their current criminal background check system. DHS began working with NIC AR to adapt DPS's online appointment scheduling system that offers childcare workers and child welfare applicants (foster and adoptive parents) the ability to make an appointment for their fingerprint scan online from their mobile device or computer, eliminating the need to stand in line for the service. Offered at a prepayment rate of \$.60 per appointment, DHS prepaid for 30,000 appointments.

As the COVID-19 pandemic continued to shape the landscape of the citizen experience with government, other Arkansas state government agencies began looking for ways to facilitate the return to in-person services. Looking for a better way to streamline inmate visitation to its various prisons and community correction centers, the Arkansas Department of Corrections (DOC) partnered with NIC AR to develop a system for adult family members to submit a request for visitation appointment online. DOC's online

appointment request system would be unique from the system offered by DHS and DPS, as it needed to include a pre-qualifying form that would expedite registration and approval.

Recognizing that the existing online appointment system would not be a good fit for this new use case, the NIC AR project manager turned to the enterprise solution offered by NIC, Inc., TeleGov, that features built-in integrations with their form development system AppEngine. Rather than build a custom solution, NIC AR offered a multi-tenant, scalable, and secure turnkey solution with fast and easy set-up in as little as one day. Using TeleGov would allow DOC's the ability to reopen safely by complying with state and federal social distancing regulations and improve the customer experience by more efficiently managing office foot traffic. In addition, TeleGov would also provide long-term business continuity by transitioning seamlessly between in-person and virtual experiences.

A scalable platform hosted on the Microsoft Azure cloud platform, TeleGov has the ability to support the creation of thousands of appointments per hour. It is designed for continuous operation, protected from power failure, physical intrusion and network outages by extensive back-up power and cooling systems, multi-layered security, and network redundancy. TeleGov databases are protected using SQL Transparent data encryption. All data is encrypted at rest and in transit to ensure that any PII remains secure.

TeleGov features built-in, secure identity management that is fully integrated with NICi, NIC's enterprise solutions for authentication based on Azure Active Directory B2C, and further enhanced to support OpenID to allow customizable authentication/SSO systems at the tenant level - making it a perfect fit for DOC's requirements. In December 2020, DOC launched a pilot program for modified in-person visitation using the TeleGov appointment scheduling platform at four locations. On March 6, 2021 the program was expanded to include six more facilities.

DOC launched a social media campaign to their 26K+ followers to promote the service. Over 375 visitations have been scheduled online since the pilot program launched in December 2020, uniting inmates with their families after nearly a year of separation.

Recognizing that the TeleGov Appointment Scheduling Platform would expand the existing capabilities and meet the growing needs of the DHS online scheduling system and DPS's In Line Online, the NIC AR product manager encouraged the agencies to make the switch. On March 31, 2021, DPS moved to the TeleGov Appointment Scheduling Platform, and DHS followed suit on April 7, 2021.

DHS is planning to begin Phase II later in 2021, which will expand the use of the online criminal background checks and fingerprinting appointment scheduling to all 10 of its divisions. Due to the success of the online appointment scheduling for the driver skills exam, DPS is expanding its use to include written exam testing, which will launch in June 2021. Likewise, DOC plans to expand visitation to all of its ADC facilities and ACC units starting June 12.

Oversight of the initiative is managed by the twelve member Information Network of Arkansas (INA) Board, who oversees the public-private partnership between the state of Arkansas and NIC Arkansas (NIC AR). Under Arkansas Code §25-27-101, the Board provides oversight for state and local digital government services. The INA Board is made up of representatives from user groups (accountants, insurance agents, chambers of commerce, attorneys and bankers) and state agencies. Governor Hutchinson appoints each member to serve a two-year term.

## Significance

### **INCLUDE:**

*Define the scope of the initiative and beneficiaries, stakeholder groups, highlight the innovation, outline what successful implementation looks like, describe what changes the initiative will have on the nominating agency, the state, constituents, describe how it fits into a larger picture.*

For the first time, Arkansas state government agencies have the tools to allow citizens the self-service ability to easily schedule and reschedule appointments anytime from any device - providing a consistent citizen experience across government agencies.

As a platform for development, TeleGov uses Azure DevOps for its ability to easily and securely share source code on an Enterprise level so that any state enterprise can contribute to the codebase. The system is sharable and available to be entirely developed and improved across all federal, state and local governments.

In addition to collecting information from a user, the system can receive payment, provide virtual video conferencing, upload documents and many other features. Data is linked to individual appointments, making it readily available at the time of appointment. Part of TeleGov's functionality is to show all appointment locations on an interactive map. Integrations with Google Maps and MapBox with OpenStreetView are configurable by tenant, which allows each agency to set up separate configurations.

TeleGov uses NIC's Microservice Platform (MSP) to send email and text messages and perform address verification and geocoding of locations. When a user creates an appointment, the system sends a confirmation email and text message that contains the confirmation number and specific information about the scheduled appointment. TeleGov automatically sends a reminder email or text a day before the appointment, and DHS, DOC, and DPS staff have the option of customizing the automated reminders in the admin tool. No user account requirements provide easy access without the need to provide usernames and passwords. In the event a user loses the email or text confirmation, they can simply enter the email they used to create the appointment on the homepage and resend the appointment confirmation.

TeleGov's roadmap includes video integrations to replace in-office visits, auto-appointment management to allow admins to enable auto-assigned meetings, tenant management with tabbed interfaces to manage branding, help pages, and custom banner notifications, and virtual waiting rooms to allow customers to check in and get a notification when it's time to enter the building for their scheduled appointment.

Overall, the TeleGov platform is an excellent example of true collaboration across all government agencies.

## Impact

### **INCLUDE:**

*(Compare the environment before the initiative was implemented, describe how it has improved, detail the immediate and longer-term impact, address the financial and non-financial reasons why this project was worthy of the investment made, describe the impact of the benefits for both the nominating agency and constituents, note quantitative metrics (cost savings, cost avoidance, ROI, usage, transactions, etc.) and qualitative benefits (citizen, business experience).*

The Arkansas Online Appointment Scheduler with TeleGov has transformed the existing capabilities of the Arkansas Department of Public Safety, the Arkansas Department of Human Services, and the Arkansas Department of Corrections by improving the quality and efficiency of their in-person services, removing the barriers created by manual processes, and saving citizens countless hours of time they no longer spend waiting in lines.

Prior to the launch of DPS's online appointment scheduler, drivers wanting to take the driver skills test would have to visit a test site location and wait in line for up to two hours to take the test. Applicants turned away due to unexpected volume at a testing location or impending closing hours were forced to return another day, only to wait an additional two hours. With over 3,400 monthly applicants, DPS contended with fluctuating and often heavy foot traffic to testing site locations. Now DPS staff can use the online admin tool within the scheduler to modify appointments and calendar events, as well as create and edit testing locations and field office availability. DPS administrators and clerks can also view the daily schedule to see all appointments scheduled within a given time frame.

Since the online scheduler launched in January 2020, more than 51,500 appointments have been created online, eliminating the need for citizens to wait in line at a testing site for the next available appointment. This has saved applicants a collective 103,000 hours that would have been spent standing in line to take the driver skills exam. DPS is expanding its use to include written exam testing, which will launch in June 2021.

Prior to the launch of DHS's online fingerprinting appointment scheduler for childcare workers and child welfare applicants, the entire background check and fingerprinting process could take anywhere from 3-6 months to process. This labor-intensive, manual process required childcare providers to send in packets of information to DHS containing written checks to pay for the FBI and state background checks. After DHS submitted payments by mail, staff members would manually enter the applicant's information into the FBI and state Criminal Background Check system and wait for results. DHS would then send the childcare provider a transaction ID that would allow the applicant to get fingerprinted at a third-party fingerprint harvester.

The online appointment scheduler and updates to the criminal background check process for childcare providers and child welfare applicants have shortened applicant processing from 3-6 months to just two weeks. Since launch on June 26, 2000, DHS has processed over 3,127 childcare and child welfare background check requests online, and nearly 17,600 applicants for these fields (in addition to foster care and adoptive parents) have signed up for fingerprinting appointments through the online scheduling tool. In addition to the online scheduler, DHS also purchased fingerprint harvester machines to use in their offices to expedite the process. Now applicants schedule appointments directly with DHS, eliminating the need to visit a third-party fingerprint harvester service.

This digital automation has enabled DHS to avoid spending an estimated \$272,712 in manual labor and paper processing costs. DHS is planning an expansion of this service to all 10 divisions starting later in 2021.

In order to mitigate the COVID-19 transmission risk during in-person visitation to various prisons, work release, supervision sanction, and community correction centers, DOC outlined guidance and directives for modified in-person visitation during the public health emergency. In addition to eligibility guidance for in-person visitation, DOC launched the online appointment request scheduler for 10 locations now accepting visitation requests. Adult family members may submit requests for visitation appointments online from their mobile device or desktop computer. All requests are pending review and approval by DOC. Over 375 visitations have been scheduled online since the pilot program launched in December 2020, uniting inmates with their families after nearly a year of separation. DOC plans to expand visitation to all of its ADC facilities and ACC units starting June 12.

A recent study conducted by the University of Utah found that the average cost per transaction for online government services was \$3.91 versus \$17.11 for the state to provide the service in person or via mail. That's a cost savings of \$13.20 per digital transaction. Using the University of Utah formula to calculate the cost savings for online appointment scheduling, the state has avoided spending roughly \$917,000 on staff resources by using the Arkansas Online Appointment Scheduler.