

**State**

Texas

**Agency**

Texas Health and Human Services

**Award Category**

Digital Services: Government to Citizen

**Project Title**

Finding Child Care in Texas: The Search Texas Child Care Website  
Modernization Project

**Project Dates**

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## What problem or opportunity does the project address?

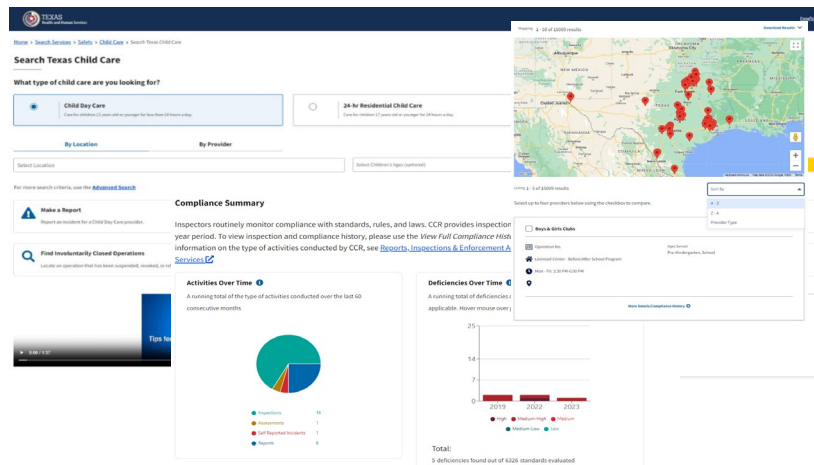
The Search Texas Child Care (STCC) website, a critical resource for parents and childcare providers in Texas, underwent a comprehensive modernization effort. This project aimed to address various challenges and shortcomings of the existing website to create a more accessible, user-friendly, and informative platform that better serves the needs of Texans seeking childcare services.

Recognizing the importance of mobile access in today's digital landscape, the Texas Health and Human Services Commission (HHS) prioritized optimizing the website for smartphones and ensuring seamless functionality across different browsers.

To achieve these objectives, HHS embarked on a comprehensive redesign and development process.

A major focus of the project was to improve the website's accessibility and inclusivity. To this end, the team implemented a Spanish version of the website, recognizing the diverse linguistic landscape of Texas. Furthermore, the website was made compliant with WCAG 2.0 AA/Section 508 standards, ensuring that individuals with disabilities could easily access and navigate content and features on the site.

The project also sought to enhance the content and functionality of the site by including helpful information from partner state agencies about child care providers in the state. Information from the Texas Workforce Commission's Texas Rising Star program was integrated into the site, providing users with valuable insights into childcare quality ratings. Additionally, the website now includes information about pre-K partnership programs, further expanding the resources available to parents and providers.



To improve the user experience, HHS implemented an interactive map feature powered by Google Maps. This feature enables users to easily locate nearby childcare providers, simplifying the search process and saving valuable time. The integration of Google Analytics allows HHS to gather data on user behavior and site usage, which can be used to further optimize the website and tailor its content to meet the needs of its audience.

## Why does it matter?

The STCC website modernization project was driven by a multifaceted business rationale, aiming to address critical challenges and seize opportunities for improvement:

- **Compliance and Risk Mitigation:** The existing website failed to comply with federal mandates, specifically regarding publishing monitoring and inspection reports. This non-compliance exposed the organization to legal and reputational risks, necessitating immediate action to rectify the situation.
- **Enhancing User Experience and Accessibility:** The previous website was not user-friendly, particularly for mobile users and those using browsers other than Internet Explorer. This limited accessibility hindered parents and providers from accessing essential information and services, creating a significant barrier to engagement.
- **Data Integrity and Accuracy:** Inconsistent data between the internal Childcare Licensing Automated Support System (CLASS) application used by Child Care Regulation (CCR) staff to document monitoring activities and the website led to confusion and potential misinformation. Ensuring data accuracy was crucial for building trust with users and facilitating informed decision-making.

- **Operational Efficiency:** Manual processes burdened HHS staff, leading to inefficiencies and potential errors. Automating these processes would streamline operations, reduce errors, and free up staff to focus on higher-value tasks.
- **Expanding Reach and Inclusivity:** The absence of a Spanish version of the website excluded a significant portion of the Texas population. Adding multilingual support would broaden the reach of services and promote inclusivity.

To address these challenges and capitalize on the opportunities, the project implemented several key changes:

- **Technical Overhaul:** The project transitioned the codebase from .NET to Java, a more modern and versatile language. It also integrated React for dynamic user interfaces, the LIFT Framework for continuous learning and innovation, and Google Analytics for data-driven insights.
- **Mobile Optimization:** The website was redesigned to be mobile-friendly, ensuring a seamless experience for users on smartphones and tablets.
- **Cross-Browser Compatibility:** Compatibility with all major browsers was ensured, eliminating accessibility barriers for users on different platforms.
- **Data Synchronization:** Data inconsistencies between CLASS and the website were resolved, ensuring that users have access to accurate and up-to-date information.
- **Process Automation:** Manual processes were automated, improving efficiency and reducing the risk of errors.
- **Multilingual Support:** A Spanish version of the website was added, expanding the reach of services to a wider audience.
- **Geolocation Services:** Integration with Google Maps enabled users to easily locate nearby childcare providers.

These changes collectively transformed the STCC website into a compliant, user-friendly, efficient, and inclusive platform that effectively serves the needs of families and childcare providers across Texas.

## What makes it different?

The STCC website modernization project stands out from other projects due to several key differentiators:

- **Comprehensive Scope:** The project tackled a wide range of issues, from technical infrastructure and compliance to user experience and accessibility. This holistic approach ensured that the website was not only modernized but also aligned with legal requirements and user needs.
- **Impactful Outcomes:** The project achieved significant results, including improved compliance, enhanced user experience, increased accessibility, expanded reach, and streamlined operations. These outcomes demonstrate the project's tangible impact on both the organization and the public it serves.
- **Innovative Solutions:** The project leveraged innovative technologies and approaches, such as the transition to Java, the integration of React and the LIFT Framework, and the use of Google Analytics for data-driven decision-making. These innovative solutions showcase the project's commitment to staying at the forefront of technology.
- **Collaboration and Partnerships:** The project involved collaboration with multiple stakeholders, including government agencies (TEA and TWC), technology partners (Deloitte), childcare providers, and citizens of Texas. This collaborative approach ensured that the project met the diverse needs of all stakeholders and fostered a sense of shared ownership.
- **Focus on Public Service:** The project's primary goal was to improve the delivery of public services related to childcare. This focus on public good sets it apart from many other projects that may prioritize profit or other private interests.

These factors collectively make the STCC website modernization project a unique and exemplary initiative that has significantly improved the way Texans access and utilize childcare resources.

## What makes it universal?

The project addresses several issues that are universal to all states or federal mandates:

- **Compliance with Federal Mandates:** The project specifically addresses the federal mandate 42 U.S. Code § 9858c(2)(D), requiring the electronic publication of monitoring and inspection reports in an accessible

format. This mandate applies to all states receiving Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF) grants, making the project's solution relevant nationwide.

- **Website Accessibility:** The project's focus on complying with WCAG 2.0 / Section 508 standards aligns with federal accessibility requirements. These standards ensure that websites are usable by people with disabilities, a requirement that applies to government services across the United States.
- **Data Transparency and Accuracy:** The project's emphasis on data consistency and accuracy between systems (CLASS and the website) is a universal concern for government agencies. Ensuring that the public has access to reliable and up-to-date information is crucial for transparency and accountability.
- **User-Centered Design:** The project's focus on improving the user experience, particularly for mobile users, reflects a broader trend in government service delivery. Making online services accessible and easy to use on various devices is a priority for governments at all levels.

By addressing these universal issues, the project offers a model for other states and agencies seeking to modernize their online services and comply with federal mandates. The project's solutions, particularly in data integration, accessibility, and user experience, can be adapted and replicated in other contexts, making it a valuable reference for improving government service delivery nationwide.

## Implementation

### What was the roadmap?

#### Enterprise View

The STCC website modernization project aligns with the broader enterprise goals of HHS in several ways:

- **Digital Transformation:** The project is a key component of HHS's ongoing digital transformation efforts, aimed at modernizing legacy systems and improving the delivery of online services to Texans.
- **Customer-Centricity:** The project's focus on user experience and accessibility aligns with HHS's commitment to providing customer-centric services that are easy to use and accessible to all.
- **Data-Driven Decision Making:** The project's use of Google Analytics to gather data on website usage supports HHS's broader goal of using data to inform decision-making and improve service delivery.
- **Collaboration and Partnerships:** The project's collaborative approach, involving multiple agencies and stakeholders, reflects HHS's commitment to working across organizational boundaries to achieve common goals.

#### Project Management Approach

The project followed a structured project management approach, using most elements from Agile methodology. This approach involved:

- **Clear Goals and Objectives:** The project had well-defined goals and objectives, focusing on compliance, user experience, data accuracy, and operational efficiency.
- **Phased Implementation:** The project was developed in phases, allowing for iterative development and testing to ensure that each component met the desired outcomes.
- **Regular Monitoring and Evaluation:** The project team monitored progress regularly, tracking key metrics and adjusting the plan as needed to ensure successful implementation, including demonstrations of the planned product on a regular basis.
- **Stakeholder Engagement:** The project team actively engaged with stakeholders throughout the process, gathering feedback and ensuring that the project met their needs.

#### Assessment and Successful Implementation

The success of the project will be assessed based on several key metrics:

- **Compliance:** Compliance with federal mandates, particularly regarding the publication of monitoring and inspection outcomes.
- **User Satisfaction:** User surveys and feedback mechanisms will be used to assess user satisfaction with the new website.

- Website Traffic and Usage: Google Analytics data will be used to track website traffic, user engagement, and other key metrics to measure the website's effectiveness.
- Operational Efficiency: The project team will track the time and resources saved by automating manual processes.

Successful implementation will be evident in:

- Increased website traffic and user engagement.
- Positive feedback from users on the website's usability and accessibility.
- Demonstrated compliance with federal mandates.
- Improved efficiency in HHS's internal processes.

Overall, the STCC website modernization project represents a significant achievement in improving public service delivery in Texas. The success of the project and website serves as a model for other agencies seeking to leverage technology to enhance their services and better serve their constituents.

## Who was involved?

The key players involved in the success of the STCC website modernization project included the childcare providers, HHS Child Care Regulation staff, HHS Regulatory Services IT staff, TEA, TWC, and Deloitte Technology Solution Services. Their expertise, dedication, and collaborative efforts were instrumental in the successful modernization of the STCC website.

The HHS Executive Steering Committee played a pivotal role in guiding the project's direction and ensuring alignment with the project's objectives. Regular meetings, including daily standups and monthly Executive Steering Committee meetings, facilitated effective communication and coordination among the team members.

The project's progress was closely monitored through quarterly reports and Federal State monitoring reports, which were prepared on a monthly and quarterly basis. These reports provided valuable insights into the project's status and helped identify any areas that required attention or improvement.

Frequent demonstrations of the work being developed were conducted throughout the project to keep all stakeholders informed about progress and to gather their feedback. This ensured that the final product met the needs and expectations of its end users.

Focus groups were organized to gain a deeper understanding of the effort required and to ensure that the project was on the right track. The kickoff meeting was instrumental in aligning all impacted parties and setting the stage for the project's successful execution.

Early engagement with partners was a key strategy that helped in understanding their needs and expectations. This, coupled with meticulous deployment planning, ensured a smooth and successful rollout of the modernized website.

The approval of user stories by product owners ensured that the developed features and functionalities were in line with user needs and preferences. Retrospectives were conducted to reflect on the project's progress and to identify areas of improvement.

In conclusion, the STCC website modernization project is a testament to the power of collaboration, effective project management, and a user-centric approach. It serves as a model for other government agencies seeking to modernize their online services and improve the delivery of critical information and resources to the public. The project's success underscores the importance of early engagement with partners, regular monitoring and reporting, and the active involvement of key stakeholders. It highlights the value of a dedicated and skilled project team, and the role of innovative technologies in enhancing the accessibility and user-friendliness of online resources.

## How did you do it?

The project successfully integrated several robust technologies, enhancing its efficiency, adaptability, and user-centric design.

- React JavaScript Library revolutionized the front-end development with its dynamic capabilities for creating interactive user interfaces and promoting code reusability.
- The LIFT Framework fostered continuous learning and innovation within the team, adapting to changing learning environments.

- Google Analytics provided valuable insights into user behavior and website performance, guiding decision-making processes and optimizing user experiences.
- Geolocation Services and the integration of Google Maps simplified the search process for users by providing real-time location data and directions to childcare providers.
- The Texas Open Data Portal Integration facilitated informed decision-making by providing users with access to a wealth of public datasets, elevating the overall user experience.

The project was executed by a diverse team of professionals, including architects, business analysts, database administrators, UX designers, developers, a LIFT Framework expert, a project manager, a release manager, a security lead, testers, and program staff.

The total cost of the project was \$10,400,000, with 16,077 operational hours. The capital hours remain unknown as the work was a fixed bid vendor contract.

## Impact

### What did the project make better?

The project successfully achieved its goals and objectives delivering significant enhancements across various aspects of the STCC website for parents and caregivers, providers, and the State of Texas.

Parents & Caregivers	Providers	State of Texas
<p><b>Faster and Easier Searches:</b> Intuitive search filters and location-based results will help parents quickly find suitable childcare options that meet their specific needs and budgets.</p> <p><b>Enhanced Transparency and Trust:</b> Detailed provider profiles with reviews, ratings, inspections and licensing information will build trust and ensure informed decision-making.</p> <p><b>Mobile-Friendly Access:</b> Anytime, anywhere access to childcare information on smartphones will empower parents on the go, especially those juggling busy schedules.</p> <p><b>Multilingual search options:</b> Parents can search for childcare in their preferred language, with detailed provider profiles, licensing information empowering non-English speaking parents to navigate the system effectively.</p>	<p><b>Reduced Administrative Burden:</b> Automated processes and efficient workflows will significantly decrease time spent on paperwork and license renewal, freeing up more time for quality care.</p> <p><b>Greater Visibility and Marketing Reach:</b> Mobile-friendly profiles and integrated directory listings will increase exposure to potential clients, leading to improved enrollment rates.</p> <p><b>Data-Driven Performance Insights:</b> Providers can access valuable data about their enrollment trends, demographics, and performance, informing strategic decision-making.</p> <p><b>Simplified Compliance and Reporting:</b> Automated reporting tools and data integrations will streamline compliance with licensing regulations, reducing errors and saving time.</p>	<p><b>Data-Driven Insights:</b> Comprehensive data insights will inform strategic decisions about increasing quality, policy changes, &amp; program development.</p> <p><b>Improved Quality Assurance:</b> Real-time data allows for proactive monitoring of licensing regulations and child development outcomes, for high-quality care.</p> <p><b>Enhanced Program Evaluation:</b> Improved data collection and analysis will enable effective evaluation of existing programs &amp; future initiatives.</p> <p><b>Increased Collaboration and Efficiency:</b> Integrated data across agencies will foster collaboration and optimize resource utilization across the childcare ecosystem.</p> <p><b>Transparency and Accountability:</b> Publicly available data will enhance transparency and accountability for agencies and childcare providers.</p>

### How do you know?

The STCC website has been comprehensively redesigned and modernized throughout the project life cycle, with a key emphasis on mobile friendliness to ensure a seamless user experience across various devices. The project dedicated significant efforts to maintain data consistency between CLASS and the site, thereby enhancing the reliability of the information provided. It also improved data exchange with partner agencies, TWC and TEA, fostering improved collaboration.

The site was enriched with valuable additions, including TWC Texas Rising Star and pre-K partnership details and indicators were introduced to highlight child care centers and homes offering 24-hour care.

A standout feature is the integration of Google Maps waypoint routing, which assists users in finding available child care locations along their regular commute routes. The implementation of Google Analytics provides CCR with



insights into the number of users visiting the sites and the number of page views. From mid-March 2024 to mid-April 2024, there was a total of 78,409 unique visitors who viewed 3,119,226 site pages.

These enhancements have significantly improved the user experience and functionality of the site, marking a major milestone in the project's success. It's important to note that much of the project cost was covered by TWC ARPA funding. This funding was crucial and may have been lost if not utilized effectively. The successful execution of the project ensured the optimal use of these funds, contributing to the overall success and sustainability of the project. This highlights the strategic financial management involved in the project.

It's crucial to mention that resolving the compliance issues was not just about adhering to standards, but also had significant financial implications. If these issues were not addressed effectively, Federal Funding could have been withheld. The successful resolution of these issues ensured the continued flow of this essential funding, further underlining the project's strategic and comprehensive approach to problem-solving. This aspect played a key role in the project's overall success and financial sustainability.

## What now?

The STCC website project was a significant investment that has yielded substantial benefits. The comprehensive redesign and modernization of the website, with a focus on mobile friendliness, has significantly improved the user experience for families in Texas looking for child care solutions. The project ensured data consistency between CLASS and the site, enhancing the reliability of the information provided. It also fostered improved collaboration with partner agencies, TWC and TEA.

Online tools were developed to streamline the sign-up process for training and information sessions, catering to the convenience of both consumers and providers. All non-compliance issues on the website were effectively addressed, ensuring adherence to all necessary standards.

The project demonstrated financial acumen by strategically utilizing much of its cost from the TWC ARPA funding. If this funding had not been effectively used, it could have been forfeited. However, the project's successful execution ensured the optimal use of these funds. Notably, the project was delivered under budget by \$300,000, on time, and with the complete planned scope. This underscores the project's financial efficiency and strategic planning.

The project is now being supported and managed by the HHS Regulatory IT Maintenance and Operations team, which provides 24x7 support and a Help Desk for assistance during working hours. This ensures the continued success and sustainability of the project. The strategic financial management and comprehensive approach to problem-solving played a key role in the project's overall success and financial sustainability.

The STCC website is available at: <https://childcare.hhs.texas.gov/Public/ChildCareSearch>  
Reference the STCC video guide at: [Finding Child Care in Texas: Overview of the Search Texas Child Care \(STCC\) Website](#).