

# Virtual Vendor Day

## CATEGORY

State CIO Office  
Special Recognition

## START DATE

June 26, 2024

## END DATE

Feb. 20, 2025



# VIRTUAL VENDOR DAY

Feb. 20, 2025



**COLORADO**

Governor's Office of  
Information Technology

**Brandi Wildfang**

Chief Communications Officer & PIO

[brandi.wildfang@state.co.us](mailto:brandi.wildfang@state.co.us)

720-601-5470

**Cathy Von Behren**

Manager - Vendor Operations

[cathy.vonbehren@state.co.us](mailto:cathy.vonbehren@state.co.us)

720-656-9597



## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Strong vendor relationships are crucial for successful state IT procurement, yet procurement regulations can pose vendor communication and engagement challenges. While in-person, vendor-inclusive events create fairness across the vendor community, they can be costly for all parties. Thus, the Vendor Services Team within the Governor's Office of Information Technology (OIT) took a new and innovative approach to address these obstacles, launching the inaugural Virtual Vendor Day.

This pioneering initiative aimed to replicate the value of an in-person vendor trade show within a fully remote work environment, ensuring equitable access and participation for the 724 OIT and vendor participants. Unlike an in-person event, vendors did not have to travel, allowing for a broader range of participation, presentations, and booths. OIT employees could "pop in and out" to attend only those presentations of interest rather than spending an entire day at a conference.

Ultimately, Virtual Vendor Day fostered a collaborative environment, open dialogue around vendor offerings and OIT's strategic objectives, and shared problem-solving in pursuit of enhanced solutions for the state. The cost savings and positive feedback demonstrate Virtual Vendor Days' value in fostering vendor relationships and improving procurement process understanding.

## IDEA

Securing optimal IT solutions for the state requires strong vendor relationships. However, procurement regulations can present challenges when communicating with vendors and their understanding of engagement opportunities. In the past, OIT had offered in-person events to facilitate these connections; however, the associated costs (e.g., venue, travel, meals, and accommodations) often created financial barriers for event organizers and participants alike, limiting vendor engagement and employee participation. A fresh approach was necessary.

### What Makes it Different

The idea for a virtual event to educate, empower and strengthen relationships between the state and its vendor partners was driven by these strategic commitments:

- **Reduce financial burdens.** Eliminate the geographic and budgetary constraints to enable increased participation from a broader range of vendors (local, national and international) and state employees.

- **Ensure inclusivity and accessibility.** Select a platform with a recording capability that allows for on-demand access to all presentations, accommodating diverse schedules and enabling participants to review content at their convenience.
- **Facilitate conversation, exploration and problem-solving.** Plan an event that facilitates a dynamic exchange of ideas, connecting innovative technologies with critical state operational needs, feature virtual presentations showcasing a diverse range of solutions (workforce planning tools, generative AI applications, human resources software, data management strategies, marketing and communication services, infrastructure software, digital accessibility tools, and risk and performance management systems).
- **Educate.** Engage state experts to provide insights into procurement processes, purchase orders, price agreements, accessibility laws and statement of work development.
- **Gather Metrics.** Ensure the virtual platform provides detailed event analytics, tracking interactions and engagement metrics to deliver comprehensive insights.

### **Why It Matters**

Characterized by a mutual exchange of ideas and collaborative learning in a concentrated four-hour timeframe, the Virtual Vendor Day event transformed OIT's engagement with its vendor community, catalyzing progress. It prioritized relationship development, fostered mutual trust, strengthened partnerships and aimed to share an understanding of the state's IT objectives. Established and newly introduced vendors participated in real-time exchanges, gaining direct insight into OIT's procurement procedures. With the virtual platform as a central connection point, removing geographical and temporal obstacles, 139 vendor exhibitors from California to Massachusetts showcased their services virtually.

Furthermore, recognizing that diverse perspectives drive innovation, a deliberate effort was made to engage a broad spectrum of businesses, including those historically underrepresented. This strategic outreach aimed to stimulate economic growth within the state, foster healthy competition that enhances quality and value, and ensure that vendor partnerships mirror the rich diversity of the communities served. Virtual Vendor Day thereby functioned as a platform for equity and inclusion, enabling businesses of varying sizes and backgrounds to contribute to the future of IT in Colorado.

### **It's Universal**

Virtual Vendor Day is a replicable model that state agencies within or outside Colorado can use. It allowed OIT to address universal priorities in modern digital government by strengthening "Government to Business" relationships critical for effective digital services. It optimized procurement, identified IT solutions, and fostered partnerships. The event also drove digital service framework development by evaluating IT solutions, providing data to refine offerings, and enhancing public digital experiences. While focused on vendors, it prioritized community

member beneficiaries by highlighting superior IT solutions to improve digitized government services for all Coloradans. Accessibility was emphasized through an accessible platform and legal presentations, ensuring inclusive and usable services.

## IMPLEMENTATION

### The Roadmap

To set the stage for Virtual Vendor Day, the project team engaged in extensive preliminary work and followed a structured path. After engaging with executive leadership and senior management to ensure that the event directly supported the broader enterprise goals of OIT, the Vendor Services Team began exploring platforms to virtually showcase both a diverse array of vendors with unique expertise and advanced technologies, as well as potential partnerships.

A Request for Information (RFI) was disseminated to ensure transparency and broad inclusion. It was more than a formality; it encouraged vendors to participate, propose presentations tailored to state requirements, and suggest relevant discussion topics. The event was also promoted through articles in the monthly Vendor Connections newsletter. Internally, we used the weekly OIT Employee Bulletin, employee intranet, email communications, and flyers to encourage participation from our staff.

The meticulously planned project would be assessed by engagement during sessions and feedback collected through surveys and direct communication. Successful implementation was marked by vendor participation, insightful presentations, and positive feedback, demonstrating a clearer understanding of state procurement processes and fostering stronger relationships. Post-event data analysis will inform future iterations, ensuring continuous improvement.

### How We Did It

**A Comprehensive & Phased Approach.** As noted above, the initial phase involved extensive consultations with executive staff to identify key state service needs and strategic vendor partnerships, followed by planning, RFI posting, vendor enrollment, event execution, and post-event analysis. The technical architecture prioritized a platform that could facilitate broad accessibility, real-time interaction, and detailed analytics over the specifics of its delivery. This enabled the event to eliminate geographical limitations, provide equitable access, and gather valuable data for future improvements, all crucial to achieving the event's goals of fostering vendor relationships and enhancing procurement processes.

**Multiple Resources.** The financial resources were primarily allocated to the virtual event platform, amounting to **\$10,000**, significantly less than the estimated costs of a comparable

in-person event. It also required collaboration across multiple state teams and vendors. The OIT Vendor Services team directed the project, overseeing planning, execution, and post-event activities, and the Purchasing and Contracts teams managed the RFI, contract development, and live event operations. OIT's Data Office, Enterprise Content Services, Platform Services, Solution Engineers, and Technology Accessibility Program (TAP), and the Department of Personnel & Administration's Colorado Supplier Diversity Program hosted virtual booths. A range of vendors also participated, presenting and hosting booths. The event drew **724 attendees**, encompassing state employees, established vendors, and potential vendors from both domestic and international locations. Participants engaged through hosting virtual booths, delivering presentations, attending sessions, and networking.

## IMPACT

Virtual Vendor Day significantly improved OIT's engagement with its vendor community. Due to costs and logistical challenges, the prior infrequent in-person events hindered diverse vendor participation and efficient procurement. Hosting a virtual event was transformational. For all participants, it enabled broader, inclusive participation, real-time dialogue, and an improved understanding of OIT's processes. OIT employees gained access to learning about a wider range of solutions, addressing a key challenge of connecting with vendors to secure optimal IT solutions. With strengthened relationships, the event streamlined procurement and promoted innovation.



### Accessibility

Vendors and public agencies alike must comply with Colorado's accessibility laws, which require that websites, IT systems and state information are easily accessible to those with disabilities. A presentation focused on those laws provided vendors with direct access to experts from OIT's Technology Accessibility Program team, allowing them to pose questions and receive immediate responses. In a separate presentation, one vendor showcased their accessibility software, offering practical insights into available solutions. This approach provided attendees with a comprehensive understanding of both the legal framework and practical applications of

accessibility, thereby elevating their knowledge and strengthening the collaborative partnership between OIT and the vendor community.

### How We Know It Was a Success - The Numbers

The \$10,000 investment in a virtual platform was well worth the cost, and below the projected costs of renting a venue (which include hourly/daily rates and minimum spending requirements for food and beverage) and reimbursing employees' travel costs. Depending on the venue and logistics (e.g., audio-visual rentals, stage, food and beverage, etc.), the cost savings range from an estimated low of ~\$145,000 (at \$200 per person) to more than \$1.8 million (at \$2,500 per person). Moreover, vendors avoided their own time and travel costs. The virtual format not only provided substantial cost savings compared to traditional events but also unlocked additional value by enabling broader and more inclusive participation, maintaining high levels of engagement and information sharing and providing detailed event analytics for future events.

#### Key Metrics:

| Top 5 Presentations<br>(total of 12 Vendor & 5 OIT/State presentations) | Attendees | Metric                   | Value |
|---|-----------|--------------------------|-------|
| How to do Business with OIT   | 172       | Total Event Attendees    | 724   |
| Intro / Keynote Speech  | 169       | # of Vendor Booths       | 139   |
| Price Agreements  | 69        | # of OIT/State Booths    | 9     |
| Statements of Work/Scope of Work  | 58        | 1:1 Conversations Held   | 388   |
| Accessibility Laws in Colorado  | 56        | Total Booth Interactions | 9,017 |

### How We Know It Was a Success - Participant Feedback

Post-event feedback was collected from state employees and vendors alike through various channels, including chat messages during the event, follow-up emails, and a comprehensive post-event survey. This feedback was instrumental in identifying areas for future improvement, suggesting potential presentation topics for subsequent events, and predominantly affirmed the positive reception and appreciation for the inaugural Virtual Vendor Day. Vendor testimonials include the following:

“I’m sure you are incredibly busy today but I just wanted to say GREAT JOB! I heard that this is your first event like this, and it couldn’t have been easy. As someone who has spent a career attending and hosting events, it stands out as one of the most impressive and original shows to date. While some of the credit goes to the Vfairs platform, the rest goes to you and your team. Our team has been very impressed with the user experience

and interactive capabilities. I thought the setup and your instructions email yesterday were simple and easy to follow (which is always appreciated in today's world). *Thank you for allowing us to join you today, and we can't wait to see what more is in store.*"

"I attended several [presentations] and these were the highlight of the event for me. They were very informative and covered topics of interest."

"I attended each of the state presentations and they were exceptionally helpful. I appreciated the thorough nature of these presentations and the information transparency."

### **What's Next**

With the data validating Virtual Vendor Day's success as a viable, dynamic, accessible platform for collaboration, OIT is committed to its continuation. Future events will build upon the inaugural event's success, incorporating lessons learned and feedback as a blueprint for improvement and expansion. We envision gathering topic suggestions from vendors and employees, refining the platform, enhancing presentation topics, and optimizing engagement strategies to maximize the event's impact further.

Maintaining Virtual Vendor Day is a strategic investment in fostering vendor relationships, streamlining procurement processes and promoting innovation. It provides a cost-effective alternative to traditional conferences, eliminating financial barriers for vendors and state employees. It further ensures broader participation, particularly from diverse and historically underrepresented businesses, driving economic growth and enhancing the quality of services delivered to the state. Furthermore, the data-rich nature of the virtual platform offers valuable insights into vendor engagement and state needs, enabling data-driven improvements to future procurements.

The ongoing investment in Virtual Vendor Day is justified by its demonstrable benefits. The event enhances communication, facilitates knowledge sharing and fosters mutual understanding between OIT and its vendor community. By providing a platform for vendors to directly engage with state experts and showcase their solutions, OIT can identify innovative technologies and optimize service delivery. Ultimately, this initiative contributes to a more efficient and effective state government, ensuring that taxpayer dollars are used wisely and that Coloradans receive the highest quality services.