NASCIO 2026 STATE IT RECOGNITION AWARDS

Digital Experience Enterprise Solutions: Public Records Act Solutions

STATE OF CALIFORNIA

California Labor and Workforce Development Agency

Department of Industrial Relations (DIR)

PUBLIC RECORDS ACT DIGITAL SERVICES

Transforming Government Transparency Through End-to-End Digital Access

Project Milestone Dates	Design and Build started in July 2025 and Go-live on December 4, 2025
Project Scope	Statewide – All DIR Divisions and Programs
Award Category	Digital Experience Enterprise Solutions
Nominating Official	Brian Wong, Deputy Secretary Innovation and Technology, California Labor and Workforce Development Agency

> ***"From paper-based burden to fully digital transparency — delivering equitable, accessible, and accountable government for all Californians."***

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Executive Summary

In a state as large and diverse as California, the right to access government records is not merely a legal entitlement — it is a pillar of democratic accountability. For millions of residents, workers, journalists, researchers, and advocates, the Public Records Act (PRA) represents one of the most direct points of contact between a citizen and their government. Yet for years, the California Department of Industrial Relations (DIR) — an agency serving over 20 million Californians — managed PRA requests through a fragmented, paper-intensive process that was slow, difficult to navigate, and inaccessible to many.

Under the strategic leadership of DIR's Chief Information Officer, the DIR and the Labor and Workforce Development Agency (LWDA) undertook a comprehensive digital transformation of its Public Records Act service delivery. Launched on December 4, 2025, the PRA Digital Services initiative replaced an antiquated manual workflow with a fully modern, end-to-end digital platform built on the DIR Cloud Platform — a secure, state-managed infrastructure purpose-built for enterprise government operations.

The results are transformational. PRA request processing time decreased from 15 days to just 2 days — an 87 percent reduction. Over 60,000 annual requests are now handled digitally with the same staffing complement. Staff time previously consumed by manual routing, tracking, and correspondence has been redirected — a 35 percent efficiency improvement applied directly to higher-value constituent services. Users rate the new portal 5 out of 5 for satisfaction. The platform is fully mobile-responsive, ADA-compliant, and supports multilingual access — ensuring that no Californian is left behind because of language, ability, or technology.

This nomination, submitted by the Deputy Secretary of the California Labor and Workforce Development Agency, recognizes the DIR and the Project team, led by the CIO of the Department of Industrial Relations for delivering one of the most impactful and measurable digital experience enterprise solutions improvements in California state government — demonstrating that strategic vision, disciplined execution, and a citizen-first design philosophy can fundamentally change the way government serves its people.

87%	60K+	35%	5 / 5
Faster Processing	**Annual Requests**	**Staff Time Saved**	**User Satisfaction**
15 days → 2 days	Handled Digitally	Via Automation	Highest Rating

Project Description

A. IDEA — The Problem and the Vision

The Challenge

The California Public Records Act grants every resident the right to inspect and obtain copies of state agency records. For the Department of Industrial Relations — which administers programs covering labor law enforcement, workers' compensation, workplace safety, prevailing wage compliance, and public works — this right generates over 60,000 formal PRA requests per year. Workers seeking evidence in compensation disputes, journalists investigating workplace fatalities, contractors verifying wage determinations, researchers studying occupational trends: all depend on DIR's ability to respond accurately, promptly, and equitably.

Prior to this initiative, DIR's PRA process was entirely manual and fragmented. Requests arrived by email, fax, and postal mail and were logged in disconnected spreadsheets. Routing to the appropriate division was a manual task prone to delay and error. Staff spent significant time tracking request status, drafting routine correspondence, and managing document retrieval across siloed legacy systems. There was no public-facing portal, no self-service capability, no real-time status visibility for requesters, and no centralized performance data. The average processing time was 15 days — often pushing the boundaries of statutory compliance.

The Workers' Compensation division, one of DIR's largest program areas, was among the most impacted. WC-related PRA requests involve complex, multi-party records touching injured workers, employers, insurers, and legal representatives. The absence of a digital intake and routing system created significant administrative burden and exposed the department to compliance risk.

What Made This Initiative Necessary

- Statutory compliance pressure — California's PRA mandates specific response timeframes, and manual processing made timely compliance increasingly difficult at scale.
- Equity gap — non-English speakers, individuals with disabilities, and residents without phone access were disproportionately disadvantaged by the phone-and-paper process.
- Operational inefficiency — staff capacity consumed by administrative coordination was unavailable for substantive public service delivery.
- Lack of transparency — requesters had no way to know where their request stood without calling DIR directly, creating call volume burdens and constituent frustration.
- Data blindness — without centralized tracking, leadership had no visibility into request volumes, cycle times, or division-level performance.

Innovation and Uniqueness

What distinguishes the PRA Digital Services initiative is not simply the adoption of technology, but the integrated, citizen-first design philosophy applied throughout. Rather than digitizing the existing process, the CIO and technology leadership reimagined the entire service experience from the requester's point of view — applying human-centered design principles, eliminating unnecessary steps, and building in accessibility from the start, not as an afterthought.

The decision to build on the DIR Cloud Platform — a state-managed enterprise infrastructure rather than a commercial off-the-shelf portal — ensured that the solution met California's strict data residency, security, and sovereignty requirements. This approach also created a reusable digital services foundation that will support future agency programs.

Alignment with Strategic Goals

The initiative directly advances LWDA's mission of promoting the welfare of California's workforce and aligns with the Governor's Executive Order on Government Innovation, California's Digital Government Strategy, and the state's commitment to equitable service delivery. By modernizing a foundational transparency function, DIR has set a benchmark for how state agencies can operationalize open government principles in the digital age.

B. IMPLEMENTATION — Design, Execution, and Delivery

Phase 1: Discovery and Process Redesign

The initiative began with a structured discovery phase in which the CIO and project team conducted stakeholder interviews across all DIR divisions, including Workers' Compensation, Labor Standards Enforcement, Occupational Safety and Health, and Public Works. The discovery process mapped the existing PRA workflow end-to-end, identifying 23 discrete pain points and redundancies. Crucially, the team also engaged external users — including legal professionals, journalists, and labor advocates — to understand the requester experience from the outside in.

Phase 2: Architecture and Platform Design

Working within the DIR Cloud Platform, the technology team designed a modern, API-driven architecture that integrated with DIR's existing case management systems while eliminating manual handoffs. Key design decisions included:

- A public-facing web portal with guided intake forms, real-time status tracking, and secure document delivery — accessible on any device, at any time.
- Automated workflow routing that directs incoming requests to the correct division based on subject matter, eliminating manual triage.
- Integrated notification system that keeps requesters informed at each stage of the process without staff intervention.
- A staff-facing case management interface with dashboards, compliance tracking, and document management capabilities.
- Built-in multilingual support with translation capabilities to serve California's linguistically diverse population.
- ADA-compliant design meeting WCAG 2.1 Level AA standards throughout.

Phase 3: Governance and Stakeholder Engagement

The CIO established a cross-divisional governance structure that included representation from Workers' Compensation, Legal, Privacy, IT Security, and Procurement. A dedicated change management program was developed, including training for all PRA-handling staff, updated policies and standard operating procedures, and a phased communication plan for external stakeholders.

The Workers' Compensation division was engaged as a primary design partner given the complexity and volume of WC-related records requests. Their subject matter expertise shaped the automated routing logic and document classification framework that underpins the platform's intelligence.

Phase 4: Build and Testing

Development followed an agile methodology with bi-weekly sprint cycles and structured user acceptance testing at each milestone. The technology team conducted load testing to validate platform performance at projected request volumes, penetration testing to ensure security, and usability testing with representative external users — including non-English speakers and users of assistive technologies.

Phase 5: Go-Live and Stabilization

The platform went live on December 4, 2025, following a phased rollout that began with the Workers' Compensation division and expanded to all DIR programs within 30 days. A stabilization period with heightened monitoring and a dedicated support queue ensured that early adopters received immediate assistance. Post-launch surveys were deployed automatically to capture user satisfaction data within 72 hours of request completion.

Challenges Encountered and Resolved

> **Key Implementation Challenge: Legacy Data Migration**
>
> • DIR's existing PRA records were stored across multiple disconnected systems with inconsistent formats. The team developed a structured data migration approach with automated validation checkpoints, ensuring that historical

request data was accurately imported into the new platform without disruption to ongoing work. All migrated data underwent privacy review prior to system cutover.

Key Implementation Challenge: Staff Adoption

• Transitioning from familiar manual workflows to a new digital platform required sustained change management. The team developed role-specific training modules, established super-users within each division, and implemented a feedback loop that allowed staff to report issues and suggest improvements during the first 90 days post-launch.

Key Implementation Challenge: Security and Privacy Compliance

• PRA requests frequently involve sensitive personal information. The platform was designed with data minimization principles and role-based access controls that ensure staff see only the records necessary for their function. The DIR Cloud Platform's government-grade security architecture met California's data residency and information security requirements.

C. IMPACT — Outcomes, Results, and Lasting Value

Before and After: A Measurable Transformation

BEFORE: Legacy Process	AFTER: Digital Transformation
15-day average processing time	2-day average processing time (87% reduction)
Requests received via email, fax, or mail	Fully digital intake via accessible web portal
Manual routing through spreadsheets	Automated intelligent routing to correct division
No public-facing status tracking	Real-time requester status visibility
English-only, no ADA compliance	Multilingual, WCAG 2.1 AA compliant
No mobile access	Fully mobile-responsive on all devices
Zero real-time performance data	Live dashboards with compliance tracking
High call volume to DIR for status updates	Self-service eliminates status inquiry calls

Quantifiable Outcomes

87%	**60K+**	**35%**	**5 / 5**
Processing Time Reduction	**Annual PRA Requests**	**Staff Efficiency Gain**	**User Satisfaction**
15 days → 2 days	Fully Digitized	Redirected to Services	Post-Completion Surveys

Benefits to Citizens, Workers, and Stakeholders

The most significant impact of the PRA Digital Services initiative is the democratization of government transparency. Access to public records is now genuinely accessible to all Californians — not just those with the time and resources to navigate a phone-dependent, paper-based system.

- Workers and injured workers: Workers' compensation-related records — a significant component of DIR's PRA volume — are now accessible digitally, expediting legal proceedings and reducing the burden on injured workers navigating complex claims processes.
- Legal professionals and advocates: Attorneys, union representatives, and legal aid organizations can submit, track, and receive responsive records without phone contact or paper correspondence, reducing costs and delays.
- Journalists and researchers: Timely digital access supports press freedom and academic inquiry into labor market trends, workplace safety incidents, and enforcement patterns.
- Non-English speaking residents: Multilingual support ensures that California's diverse workforce — including Spanish, Tagalog, Chinese, Vietnamese, and Korean speakers — can exercise their public records rights without language as a barrier.
- Individuals with disabilities: ADA-compliant design ensures that assistive technology users have full and equal access to the portal.

Operational and Fiscal Impact

The 35 percent reduction in staff time spent on PRA administration has been redirected to substantive program delivery — investigations, enforcement actions, and direct constituent services. This productivity gain represents significant fiscal value without requiring additional headcount.

The elimination of paper-based processing, physical mailing, and manual correspondence has reduced operational costs and reduced DIR's environmental footprint. The DIR Cloud Platform's shared infrastructure model also enables future programs to leverage the same digital services foundation, multiplying the return on investment across the agency enterprise.

Scalability and Replicability

The PRA Digital Services platform was designed with modularity and replicability as explicit requirements. The DIR Cloud Platform architecture and the digital intake, routing, and delivery framework can be extended to:

- Other LWDA departments and programs requiring public-facing intake and records management.
- Additional DIR program areas beyond PRA — including workplace safety citation appeals, wage claim submissions, and contractor registration.
- Other California state agencies facing similar PRA modernization challenges, using DIR's implementation as a validated reference model.

The CIO has already engaged peer agencies across LWDA to share implementation learnings, governance frameworks, and technical architecture documentation — positioning this initiative as a statewide model for transparent, accessible, and efficient digital government.

Alignment with NASCIO Digital Experience Enterprise Solutions Criteria

NASCIO Criterion	LWDA / DIR Achievement
Enhanced User Experience	5/5 user satisfaction; guided digital intake; real-time status tracking; self-service eliminates dependency on phone contact.
Improved Access at Scale	60,000+ PRA requests per year handled digitally; serving 20M+ Californians across all DIR programs and divisions.
Mobile Accessibility	Fully mobile-responsive portal — accessible on any device, at any time, from any location.
Inclusive / Equitable Access	Built-in multilingual support and WCAG 2.1 AA ADA compliance — ensuring equitable access for all Californians.
Measurable ROI	87% processing time reduction; 35% staff efficiency gain; significant cost avoidance through automation and workflow modernization.

Innovation	State-managed cloud platform with automated intelligent routing, real-time compliance dashboards, and citizen-centric digital service design.
Sustainability	Modular architecture enables expansion to additional programs; replicable model for other state agencies; foundation for future AI-assisted records processing.

Supplemental Information

The following links are provided as supplemental reference. The written content of this nomination is self-contained and does not rely on external links for completeness.

- California Department of Industrial Relations: www.dir.ca.gov
- California Public Records Act Information: oag.ca.gov/government/records
- California Labor and Workforce Development Agency: labor.ca.gov
- DIR Digital Services Overview: dir.ca.gov/digital-services

Partner References

This initiative was executed through disciplined internal leadership by DIR's Office of the Chief Information Officer, with collaboration across multiple agency partners. All external implementation partners engaged in this project were selected through California's competitive procurement process and are referenced here in generic terms in accordance with NASCIO submission guidelines.

Collaboration Highlights

• Cross-agency coordination: LWDA department liaisons, Workers' Compensation program staff, and DIR Legal and Privacy teams served as co-designers and subject matter partners throughout implementation.

• Technology infrastructure: The DIR Cloud Platform, a state-managed enterprise infrastructure, provided the foundational architecture for the digital services platform.

• Accessibility compliance: External accessibility testing partners conducted independent WCAG 2.1 AA validation to ensure full ADA compliance prior to launch.

• Security assurance: Independent security assessment was conducted by state-certified cybersecurity partners as required by California Information Security Policy.

• Change management: Organizational change management support was provided through a state-contracted partner, with all training and communication developed in collaboration with DIR leadership.

Deputy Secretary Innovation and Technology Statement

The California Department of Industrial Relations has transformed one of the most fundamental points of contact between state government and the public — delivering a digital experience enterprise solutions that is faster, more equitable, and more accessible than anything that existed before. The PRA Digital Services initiative represents exactly the kind of technology leadership that California needs: strategic in vision, measurable in impact, and enduring in value. This is government working as it should — for all Californians.

— Brian Wong, Deputy Secretary Innovation and Technology, California Labor and Workforce Development Agency