

**2004 INNOVATIONS AWARDS PROGRAM  
Application Form**

1. Program Name: **SAFR (School Aids Financial Reporting) Budget and Annual Report Program. SAFR is pronounced “sapphire.”**
2. Administering Agency: **School Financial Services Team, Department of Public Instruction, Madison, Wisconsin**
3. Contact Person (Name and Title): **David Carlson, Director, School Financial Services Team**
4. Address: **125 South Webster Street, P.O. Box 7841, Madison, Wisconsin 53707-7841**
5. Telephone Number: **(608) 266-6968**
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7. E-mail Address: **david.carlson@dpi.state.wi.us**
8. Web site Address: To view a district’s submitted data through the Reporting Portal go to <https://www2.dpi.state.wi.us/safr/>. Click on “Madison Metropolitan (3269),” then “Financial Data Home,” then “Budget Report (PI 1504 Internet),” then “2003-2004,” then “Continue,” and then “All Accounts.”
9. Please provide a two-sentence description of the program.

**The SAFR Budget and Annual Report program is a new Internet based school district data reporting program that not only allows districts to submit data to the department but it also edits the data for accuracy as the data is submitted. This data is then used in the calculation of \$4.2 billion dollars of general aid to 426 school districts.**

10. How long has this program been operational (month and year)?

**This program has been operational since July 1, 2003 which is the beginning of Wisconsin’s 2003-2004 school fiscal year.**

11. Why was the program created? (What problem[s] or issue[s] was it designed to address?)

**The department had been using an MS DOS diskette program to collect financial data from school districts. The program was not user friendly and had limited data editing capability which caused the department to do extensive (10 months) of “desk**

auditing” of the data. The new SAFR program design is much more user-friendly with teaching (streaming audio/video) tutorials and edits that will reduce the time it takes to audit submitted data to 4 months, cutting the time by more than half. This is significant because Wisconsin state government positions are being reduced at the same time responsibilities are increasing.

12. Describe the specific activities and operations of the program in chronological order.

**School district staff may upload a data file or manually input fiscal data into the SAFR program on the Internet. The program then runs approximately numerous edits (100+) to check the data for accuracy. For example, district data on file at the department must match inputted data. Another example is that the data is checked to ensure that the districts are using the prescribed chart of accounts. Before the data is electronically submitted to the department, the data is displayed in report format for reasonability. This is done by comparing district data with state averages and prior year district data. These editing routines ensure that the submitted data is accurate.**

13. Why is the program a new and creative approach or method?

**Internet based data submission is common. However, inputting data into potentially 20,000 accounts with data edits numbering into the hundreds is not. Additionally, to design a program that can be successfully used by 426 different school district users of varying backgrounds and accounting competencies has been a challenge that has been met. Also, school district hardware platforms have not been standardized, thereby posing an additional challenge to the department.**

14. What were the program’s start-up costs? (Provide details about specific purchases for this program, staffing needs and other financial expenditures, as well as existing materials, technology and staff already in place.)

**This major paradigm shift in reporting finance data has been done with no additional costs to the state of Wisconsin. The School Financial Services Team received an \$80,000 federal NCES grant that jumped started the SAFR project. The team, from its existing budget of \$12,000, purchased various pieces of software needed to create or enhance the reporting program. For example, a component called DynamicPDF was purchased to create PDF documents on the fly from within the program code. A multi-media software package, called Camtasia from TechSmith, was purchased to record tutorials that could be streamed off the server. Our department already owned a version of SA-FileUp that is used to upload files to our server.**

**However, it was understood from the beginning that current staff of 14 individuals would take full responsibility for all necessary phases of the program that were not fulfilled by the grant money including yearly maintenance. The team has seen**

**project RFPs, requests for proposals, similar to SAFR that ran into the hundreds of thousands of dollars.**

15. What are the program's annual operational costs?

**This is a difficult question to answer as our IT department serves many other teams within the agency and to cost out SAFR on a proration basis would be difficult. However, having said that, there are no additional costs above and beyond those that were incurred using our old methodologies.**

16. How is the program funded?

**This program is funded by General Purpose Revenue of the state of Wisconsin.**

17. Did this program require the passage of legislation, executive order or regulations? If YES, please indicate the citation number.

**No, additional legislation or administrative action was not necessary as the department of Public Instruction is authorized to collect financial data from school districts.**

18. What equipment, technology and software are used to operate and administer this program?

**All data is kept in an Oracle 8i database and PL/SQL stored procedures are used to access it. All coding is handled by Active Server Pages (ASP) from Microsoft, and are run on a server using Microsoft's IIS 5.0. Uploading of files is handled by shareware called SA-FileUp. Finally, the Camtasia tutorials are recorded using a standard-issue desktop PC. Usability tests were performed using a personal camcorder from a staff member and the use of Camtasia for screen capture.**

19. To the best of your knowledge, did this program originate in your state? If YES, please indicate the innovator's name, present address, telephone number and e-mail address.

**Yes, the School Financial Services Team did have a vision of a data submission process that would yield in a short time high quality data that could be used in the calculation of over \$4 billion of aid to school districts. This was a team project that incorporated the innovative ideas of many of the team staff.**

20. Are you aware of similar programs in other states? If YES, which ones and how does this program differ?

**The School Financial Services Team knows that other states collect fiscal data electronically but not with the extensive edits and teaching tutorials of SAFR.**

21. Has the program been fully implemented? If NO, what actions remain to be taken?

**The SAFR program will be fully implemented with the annual report district data submission that will take place during the summer of 2004. Districts submitted budget report data in the fall of 2003 using the SAFR program.**

22. Briefly evaluate (pro and con) the program's effectiveness in addressing the defined problem[s] or issue[s]. Provide tangible examples.

**The SAFR program has delivered on its intended promises. All but 6 districts submitted their budget report data on or before the due date and the built in edits produced high quality data that will be used in an April 2004 school district estimate of aid. Additionally, technical assistance to districts during the submission process was handled by one or two team members rather than the nine that were trained to do so. The Internet server was down only 30 minutes during the month long data submission window which attests to the robustness of the software and hardware used.**

**The only major frustration that the team has is that SAFR has opened the team's eyes to many additional ideas that would further streamline the data submission process but our human resources and money are limited. Therefore, we have had to be careful with the developmental flow of enhancements and spin-offs. Sometimes we have made demands of our IT programmer to implement new ideas when the ideas have not been fully developed.**

23. How has the program grown and/or changed since its inception?

**SAFR will continue to grow and change as would any project of this magnitude. Many suggestions for improvement have come from School district staffs who have participated extensively in the design and testing of the SAFR program. For example, users suggested the "Download to Excel" option. Their input will continue to be an important element in the maturity of the SAFR program.**

24. What limitations or obstacles might other states expect to encounter if they attempt to adopt this program?

**The challenges that other states might experience are many but quite frankly they are more human challenges than software/hardware ones. Any state wishing to undertake a project of this scope with comparable staff levels must have staff that can fulfill the many roles of a highly effective work team. The School Financial Services Team is blessed with team members who are planners, problem solvers, organizers, motivators, compromisers, alternative path identifiers, teachers, critics, good listeners, and those who thoroughly understand the team's business context. The team remained both focused and patient throughout this multi-year project.**

Add space as appropriate to this form. When complete, return to:

**CSG Innovations Awards 2004**

The Council of State Governments

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DEADLINE: All original applications must be received by April 20, 2004, to be considered for an Innovations Award for 2004.

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