

**2003 INNOVATIONS AWARDS PROGRAM  
Application Form**

**1. Program Name**

County eGovernment Initiative

**2. Administering Agency**

Nebraska Secretary of State

**3. Contact Person (Name & Title)**

Greg Lemon

Chief Deputy Secretary of State

**4. Address**

P.O. Box 94608

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**8. Please provide a two-sentence description of the program.**

The County eGovernment Initiative provides supports development of websites and online services for interested county governments throughout Nebraska. Nebrask @ Online, the state's official web portal and network, provides the service through state resources at no cost to participating counties.

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

A pilot project with 6 counties was initiated in July 2000 and made available statewide in July 2001.

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

State government in Nebraska moved to the Web in 1995. Yet five years later, only 9 of Nebraska's 93 county governments had any sort of web presence. Those that did were generally larger counties with sufficient resources, or counties where an organization had placed an economic development-oriented site at the county URL. The County eGovernment Initiative was created to leverage state resources toward assisting Nebraska counties to move online. Beginning with basic websites, the project has assisted 54

counties to create an online presence, with a long-term goal of creating the ability for online transactions between counties, their citizens and the state.

The program uses State and local government resources more efficiently by providing common hosting, layout templates (which may be customized to provide a unique look for each) and applications for county web sites.

#### **11. Describe the specific activities and operations of the program in chronological order.**

In July, 2000, the Nebraska State Records Board (NSRB) initiated a pilot project to leverage the resources of the state's Nebrask@ Online network in bringing 6 Nebraska counties online. Nebrask@ Online is the official state website and portal operated under the direction of the NSRB. The six counties represented diversity in both population and geographic location. Each county could choose from several templates that could be modified to make them unique to the county. County officials were trained to update the content themselves. They were trained with software that they were already familiar with (MS Word).

Websites were in place by November 2000 in each of the six pilot counties. The first achievement was posting local election results to the county websites. The websites had information about the county such as, historical information, a public meeting calendar, a county office page for each office, a feedback form, and contact information. Links to services were also put on the site such as getting birth certificates online, marriage license information, and many others.

In July 2001 training began for the rest of the state. Nebrask@ Online started using a content management system called Zope to help facilitate an easier way for counties to update their information. Zope is web based and allows county officials to have access to only the content of the pages. Zope also allows Nebrask@ Online to train many counties at one time by using local community college computer labs. Fifty-four counties are currently live with web sites and we are expecting to have approximately 65 counties live by mid 2003.

Nebrask@ Online is in the process of bringing interactive county services online. A marriage license application is currently being tested and is expected to be launched by mid 2003. Other applications are being considered for future use, such as online property tax payments, land records, an online warrant list, and others.

#### **12. Why is the program a new and creative approach or method?**

The County eGovernment Initiative allows county government to have a web presents without any direct cost to the county. County government has the ability to control the information they provide to the citizens of their county. It also is the first step towards integrating state and local government services. The project also serves as an educational

tool for local government officials. They are learning how the Internet can make their job easier while also giving better service to their constituents.

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

The pilot phase cost was \$25,000, which was provided by an NSRB grant. No new purchases were required because Zope is an open source application. There was a cost to send one Nebrask@ Online staff person to Zope training. Two Nebrask@ Online staff members were committed to the project. The counties did not have to purchase any new software for the project. They used MS Word, which they already had purchased for their normal use.

**14. What are the program's annual operational costs?**

First-year operational costs were approximately \$90,000, with ongoing annual operating costs of approximately \$40,000.

**15. How is the program funded?**

The program is funded through a transfer from the Secretary of State's Uniform Commercial Code Cash Fund to the NSRB. Prior to initiation of central UCC filing in 2000, a portion of these funds went to the counties. The County eGovernment Initiative was a way to give some of that money back to the counties in the form of a web site.

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

No.

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

An open source content management system called Zope is used for the project. No other hardware or software was necessary. County officials use MS Word to create the content for the content of the web site.

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

Yes the program originated in Nebraska.

Nebraska Secretary of State, John Gale

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

We are not aware that the approach used in Nebraska is in place anywhere else.

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

Phase I of the project, which provides assistance in developing a basic county website, is nearing completion. Phase II, which will ramp up in 2003 and continue indefinitely is to assist counties in providing online transactions (permits, tax payments, etc.).

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

The County eGovernment Initiative has allowed very small counties to have a web presence that they most likely would not have had. It allows equity among all counties in the State of Nebraska to provide information and services to the people of the state. Several counties have commented on how their web site has cut down on the number of phone calls they receive. Some county clerks are saving time by having the local press download and print the agenda and minutes instead of having it mailed to them.

Some counties just don't want to have a web site. Part of the problem is due to lack of education on how a web site can make them more efficient rather than creating more work for them. Computer skills of officials also affects whether a county has a web site. Basic computer skills' training is necessary for some people for continued growth of the project.

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

Several county officials are becoming advocates for local online interactive applications and are helping to move this process forward.

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

Other states may not get the support that this project has gotten. They need a champion like our Secretary of State to move the process along. With the budget problems in some states, funding will be an obvious issue.

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

**CSG Innovations Awards 2003**

The Council of State Governments

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DEADLINE: All original applications must be postmarked or e-mailed by April 11, 2003, to be considered for an Innovations Award for 2003.