

Case Study: The Texas Ethics Commission

Custom Developed Filing Application Simplifies Data Entry and Increases Electronic Filer Satisfaction

Opportunity

The Texas Ethics Commission's (TEC) legacy electronic filing application became outdated. Installed on Windows PCs, it left users of mobile devices and other operating systems behind when campaign finance, lobbyist, and personal financial statement reports were due. TEC aimed big, seeking fixed bids for a statement of work for a web application to be hosted by the agency that could serve all filers, as well as agency administrative users. As part of the application, TEC was looking for mobile functionality that could accommodate all three filer types, an implementation that could accommodate the heavy filer volumes around key deadlines, and features that could leverage TEC forms for filers at the local level.



Solution

RFD & Associates, Inc. (RFD) proposed a solution based on custom Java software, open source infrastructure software, and hardware virtualization. To accommodate mobile users, responsive design tools and development using HTML5 were included in the proposal. To provide maximum functionality and development speed, RFD leveraged existing tools to handle scheduling, data transfers and uploads.

Working closely with TEC staff, RFD developed the application and all of its features. To do this, RFD used a hybrid agile project management methodology. RFD also clarified and documented all requirements. As requirements for each area of functionality were completed RFD began iterative development, putting results in front of users as quickly as possible. Functionality was rolled out to production as each area was completed with go-live dates strategically selected to minimize impact on filers around key deadlines. RFD's application performance management team tested the application for its ability to handle higher-than-expected user loads. To ensure that TEC's entire filer community was served, the application was designed to provide both a "fast path" for experienced filers, and a detailed guided path for less experienced filers.



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Results

The bottom line was a big win for the Texas Ethics Commission and their filers, including:

- Increased user satisfaction reported from filers linked to ease of use
- Reduced time spent on data entry as a result of useful application shortcuts
- Decreased call volumes attributed to intuitive, user-friendly application design
- Integrated agency administrative functionality into a single enterprise application

Many factors contributed to the success of the project, including:

- Involved and committed agency leadership, including support that came from the Commissioners on down
- Frequent status updates, including updates at every Commission meeting for the duration of the project
- Interactive development, including Commissioners providing guidance on application functionality and appearance
- Consistent input and clarification from agency experts in each area of functionality
- Thorough testing conducted by vendor personnel, agency staff and the user community
- Specific attention to application performance testing to address concerns about handling peak loads

TEC's success has also attracted attention at the national level. TEC staff discussed the new application with their peers around the country at the 2015 Council on Governmental Ethics Laws (COGEL) annual conference where attendees were impressed with the comprehensive approach to the project and the ease of use provided to application users.

In August 2017, TEC contracted with RFD to provide Modification and Maintenance Services for the Electronic Filing Application. Included in this contract is the exclusive rights for RFD to proliferate the application to TEC-authorized Texas City and County Governments.

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