

Submission: CSAC Challenge Award Submission
Inyo County: Online Fictitious Business Name Registration
Program Category: Government Finance, Administration, and Technology
Population Category: Rural

Overview (25 words or less) – The Inyo County Clerk-Recorder launched the first completely digital Fictitious Business Name Filing in California, dramatically increasing compliance, transparency, ease of operation and efficiency. (25 words)

Challenge – Inyo County is the second largest county in California, with a very dispersed population. Many residents live more than 40 miles from the County offices—making filing paperwork in-person at the County offices time-consuming and expensive. Having longer commute times can also reduce compliance rates with required filings, such as Fictitious Business Name (FBN) Filings. Unfortunately, Inyo County has few resources to expand services, so we must look for innovative ways to make processes easier and more accessible for residents. We're seeing increasing smartphone use, even among rural and elderly populations, and constituents increasingly expect access to 24/7 digital services. The County wanted to explore digitizing the FBN process, but its existing technology systems couldn't accommodate the required elements, which included capturing digital signatures. Luckily, we were able to work with CityGrows, a government technology startup based in Los Angeles, to build an online FBN process, which launched in December, 2017.

Explain the unique or critical factors that led to this project.

The factors that led to the success of this process were:

- The County leadership's interest in providing accessible digital services to its rural population
- The County's willingness to work with a startup in the government technology space, particularly to consider new ways of funding software (without any up-front costs or procurement, with compensation derived through payment processing fees passed on to constituents)
- The office staff's interest and support for digital solutions
- CityGrows' interest in learning about and supporting the needs of rural governments

Innovative Solution – One of the most difficult challenges for small local governments to overcome is the technical challenges and costs involved with delivering digital services. In a time of limited budgets and overworked IT staff, it's very difficult for government to implement better technology. Working together, CityGrows and Inyo County analyzed the existing paper forms and in-office workflow, discovered opportunities to streamline questions, automatically calculate payments, and explored ways to meet the legal requirements for online signatures.

We're proud to report that more than 80% of filings now take place on our new digital platform!

Originality – Inyo County was the first county to launch a fully online FBN process, despite our small size and limited budgets.

Cost Effectiveness –This program has resulted in increased efficiency for our staff, increased compliance with FBN filing requirements for the public (and therefore a modest increase in revenue to the County) while operating without any additional cost to Inyo County.

What was the program/project's budget? \$0

How much money did the program save? We estimate that over the first six months of the process, we've saved resources through increasing efficiency. With this program, we've reduced the staff time needed to process each FBN by at least seven minutes. We are a small county and process approximately 20 FBNs per month, for a savings of 14 hours of staff time (approx. \$600) over the last six months of implementation.

Results - The online FBN program has been embraced by the business community in Inyo County. The program generated local press coverage when it was approved by the County Supervisors, and again when it was implemented. It's gotten positive feedback from business owners, county staff, banking professionals and our elected officials. Instead of having to drive up to 80 miles round trip, or wait weeks for forms to be processed by mail, FBNs can now be submitted and filed within hours. Local credit unions have shared with the County Clerk that they now direct customers to the online FBN program, allowing them to open up an account for their customers immediately.

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