

## **GCN Award Winner for Government Agency IT Achievement – 2008**

**Agency:** Department of Health and Human Services

**Project:** The Information Collection Request Review and Approval (ICRAS) System

**Nomination Submitted by:** ICRAS Support Team- CTAC

Following is the nomination letter submitted for this project, summarizing the project's accomplishments, the technologies used and innovative steps taken to achieve them, and the resulting impact the project had in improving the agency's efforts.

### **Accomplishment:**

Reduction Act (PRA) requires Federal agencies to minimize the burden that information collections (ICs) impose on the public, while maximizing their public benefit, and be responsible for tracking their collections, the annual responses and burden (hours and cost) imposed by those collections. The objective of Information Collection Request, Review and Approval System (ICRAS) was to streamline a complex, labor and paper intensive business process to enhance operations and employee efficiency. Under mandate by the PRA to obtain Office of Management and Budget (OMB) approval for the collection of information from the public, HHS envisioned a centralized, electronic repository to store documents and their related attachments and links accessible via the internet allowing employees of multiple Federal agencies the ability to virtually prepare, track, report on and administer information collections. ICRAS's design to transform a largely paper-driven procedure with multiple recordkeeping and reporting redundancies into a simpler, more efficient and faster workflow and paperless document management system satisfies the Government Paperwork Elimination Act (GPEA).

Since 1999, ICRAS has aided HHS in its missions as a workflow management application. ICRAS stores documents, their related attachments and versions, in a single web-based paperless repository for real-time IC Request (ICR) access and status reports. ICRAS meets HHS's needs for electronically approving ICRs in an efficient, effective, and cost savings manner conducting business with internal and external clients by freeing resources to analyze and process information itself, not push paper; reducing unnecessary duplication of data collected. ICRAS was deemed PRA compliant by OMB, and with the success of the electronic processes, had been given OMB approval that ICRAS become a government wide system and encouraged agencies to use the system. OMB enlisted HHS's assistance to collaborate on reengineering ROCIS for the release of the new required business process for submissions supporting the enterprise adoptable, innovative web services approach to data submission using Extensible Markup Language (XML) to encourage a shared service environment.

The advanced functionality of ICRAS affects multiple stakeholder communities, including citizens, businesses, other federal organizations, and internal structures. A few primary examples of inter and intra agency collaborations using the tool would be HHS, OMB and EPA. Within HHS, ICRAS is an enterprise-wide, web-based business system that provides users end-to-end electronic processing of ICRs; the system is used at the Department level and by its 12 operating Agencies to collaborate on ICRs from inception to electronic submission from the lowest sub-agency level to the Agency Clearance Officer and onto OMB. OMB's Office of Information and Regulatory Affairs (OIRA) and the General Services Administration (GSA) Regulatory Information Service Center (RISC) interest in ICRAS is used to collaborate on ICRs from request to OMB approval; transmitting ICRs, also known as "packages" between HHS and the RISC/OIRA Consolidated Information System (ROCIS) to receive timely, validated electronic data submissions. The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has entered into its second year's agreement to be provided ICRAS, also for the purpose of internal workflow from inception of IC to OMB approval and relative collaborations.

**Technology:**

By developing a customized "grass roots" government-off-the-shelf (GOTS) application, ICRAS utilizes the latest innovative technology with Oracle, Ruby on Rails, Java, XML and Web Services to integrate internal operational, business process, and workflow requirements with legislative mandates into a single information collaboration tool. A completed electronic ICR package generated by ICRAS provides desk officers and analysts the ability to focus on the efficiency of the survey instrument, and more importantly, the effectiveness and continued necessity of the information actually collected from the public. Utilization of ICRAS across the government will reduce the information technology (IT) hardware and software costs for participating agencies, enable consistent management of ICRs and have a significant reduction in hours and costs associated with ICRs, further reducing burden on the public and businesses. ICRAS uses audit trails and timestamps to maintain the integrity and security of the system and the ICs.

In addition, it employs several World-Wide Web Consortium (W3C) standards. When ICRAS wishes to initiate a transaction it encodes the necessary data into XML as defined by the XML schema published by ROCIS. The XML is wrapped in a Simple Object Access Protocol (SOAP) package and sent using the Hypertext Transfer Protocol (HTTP) protocol to the ROCIS web service listener port. ROCIS processes the package and sends back a response that either indicates success or that an error has occurred. In accordance with OMB's recommendation for government use of ICRAS, it is the only system approved to connect with ROCIS. ICRAS also connects to the ROCIS web services to retrieve real-time status of packages at OMB to synchronize the

ICRAS database with the OMB database. Currently, both the ROCIS and ICRAS systems only handle the data that pertain to the collection of information, i.e., justifications, type of collection, cost and hour of burden calculation, etc, but with the exception of public comments, neither system contains any of the data actually collected from the public.

ICRAS utilizes ground-breaking Team Regulatory XML (T-ReX) “core components” developed for the federal government by HHS, EPA, GSA, OFR, GPO, the Federal Information Collection System Interagency Taskforce (DOT, USDA, DOL, EPA, HHS, Treasury), OMB, NARA, and the eRulemaking Initiative. TReX allows the PRA and rulemaking communities to more effectively communicate with each other via their information system using XML. It incorporates the best practices of data harmonization, “Core Components” as defined by UN/CEFACT TGB-17 standards developed by the United Nations, and the International Organization for Standardization (ISO) 11179 naming standards. ICRAS was the first to use T-ReX core components to simplify and improve the ICRAS/ROCIS PRA information exchange process. Ultimately, TReX improves the regulatory process and allows ICRAS to work together with ROCIS more like a “Federal Enterprise” solution.

**Impact:**

Due to ICRAS’s success in electronic submissions to ROCIS, OMB has selected it as the sole partner system for communicating electronically to submit completed ICRs. As a result, HHS has developed a Service Provider program whereby agencies can enter into term agreements to formalize contractual arrangements with HHS to use ICRAS. ICRAS has allowed HHS and its partner agencies to fulfill the President’s Management Agenda (PMA), E-Government Act of 2002, and GPEA requirements, as well as fostering collaborative accomplishments to include:

- OMB determines the effectiveness of Federal agency implementation of the PRA by the occurrence of certain violations of the Act (i.e., violations due to unintended lapse of OMB approval). In years past, HHS identified from 13 to 27 of these violations each year. Since HHS implemented ICRAS, these violations have been eliminated.

This is in large part due to tracking and reminder features of ICRAS.

- Under the paper-based business process, ICRs would commonly range from 10 to over 100 pages. Operating Divisions in HHS were required to supply the Department with three paper copies of each request, two of which needed to be sent to OMB. Managing the paper and arranging for special delivery every day consumed valuable staff time. With ICRAS, the paper management burden and time spent between review stages was virtually eliminated.
- In Congressional Testimony (GAO-06-477T, March 8, 2006); the Government Accountability Office (GAO) reviewed a government wide sample of collections and processes of four Agencies responsible for a significant portion of the collection burdens, EPA being one of them; the GAO

found EPA's existing processes specifically focused on reducing burden. Without higher performance metrics than GAO studies and with ICs being the "life blood" of the Agency, one of the strongest customer testimonials in support of federal strategic goals and initiatives was delivered to HHS in the form of an executed MOU/IAG by the EPA as an ICRAS service customer. On two separate occasions, an independent third party reviewed contract requirements and the HHS office infrastructure. In the first review, a formal requirements analysis was conducted to insure the system met business process expectations; ICRAS was deemed a success.

In the second review, a multi-federal agency group, including OMB, performed an Independent Verification and Validation (IV&V); ICRAS outperformed other Federal systems and consequently, was selected to be the PRA system of choice for all agencies. The success of ICRAS streamlining information flow throughout each agency and to OMB with a centralized system with common business practices improves interagency collaboration and promotes common federal collection efforts to increase citizen visibility over the process, reducing burden across the government and ultimately, from the public. Through execution of the MOU/IAG with EPA, ICRAS' reach can be extended into Rulemaking. A testament to ICRAS's success occurred in 2002, 2003 and 2005, when the Congressional Government Reform Committee Chairman recognized ICRAS as a government-wide best practice for its effort to benefit OMB as a multi-agency "grass-roots" electronic initiative. This is further demonstrated by the designation of Finalist in 2007 and 2008 for the Excellence.gov Award and 2008 Intergovernmental Solutions Award.