

**Please answer the following three questions—limiting your responses to no more than 500 words per question.**

## **DESCRIPTION OF ACCOMPLISHMENTS**

### **A. Briefly describe:**

- **The nature of the challenge the agency needed to address.**
- **The IT solution and key steps the agency IT team (and key stakeholders) took to address the challenge.**

### **Nature of Challenge**

The GovBenefits.gov mission is to become the single source for citizens to identify Federal and State benefit and assistance programs that may meet their needs. The site exists to simplify the process of citizens finding benefit and assistance information, and determine potential eligibility. From citizens learning about GovBenefits.gov, locating the site, searching for and accessing information, completing the eligibility questionnaire, reviewing program descriptions, and following transfer links to sponsoring agencies, each feature must be designed to serve the user. In 2008, GovBenefits.gov continued to improve the benefit search process with the addition of SSA BEST, a Customized Connection solution featuring Social Security Administration programs.

GovBenefits.gov provides a unique eligibility-screening questionnaire, composed of conditional questions that probe the visitor's situation and circumstances. The system cross-references questionnaire responses against the program eligibility database. The result is a customized list of programs matching visitors' specific needs, reducing time wasted researching benefits they are not qualified to receive.

At the time of the site's launch in 2002, the site featured 55 programs, representing all of the original partner agencies, and was worth over \$1 trillion in annual citizen benefits. As of May 2008, the Web site featured more than 390 Federal programs and 610 State-administered programs. More than 28 million citizens visited GovBenefits.gov from the site's launch in 2002 through April 2008, generating 7.2 million referrals from the site to the government agencies that administer benefits.

### **IT Solution**

New innovations based on the original GovBenefits.gov technology are needed to continue improving the citizen's benefits search process. Customized Connection narrows the pre-screening process to programs sponsored by a single Federal partner. Customized Connection creates exclusive content for the agency's customers with minimal additional costs. This approach saves government resources spent on call centers that handle benefit inquiries, decreases the number of non-qualifying applications, and ensures content accuracy through use of a proven content management system.

In March 2008, GovBenefits.gov successfully launched <http://best.ssa.gov>, its first partner Customized Connection for the Social Security Administration. This collaborative effort has replaced SSA's existing benefit eligibility screening tool (BEST) with the same pre-screening questionnaire used on GovBenefits.gov. The SSA BEST Customized Connection screens citizens for 17 different Social Security programs and provides them with a list of the Social Security benefits that they may be eligible to receive. Implementing GovBenefits.gov's powerful

search capabilities, pre-screening technology and program database saves SSA resources and saves citizens' time and effort by making benefit information consistent across government websites.

Though the new site retains the overall look-and-feel of the previous site, the supporting rules engine and infrastructure are in fact those of GovBenefits. The new SSA BEST site helps advance the President's Management Agenda objective of reducing redundancy within government, resulting in substantial savings for America's taxpayers.

## **B. TECHNOLOGY USED**

**Briefly detail the technologies (hardware, software and services) used to address the challenge and the rationale for selecting them.**

GovBenefits.gov is a component-based architecture comprised of four modules. As the primary J2EE component, the WebLogic Portal public-facing website was designed as a three-layer application architecture that separates logical responsibilities to enhance flexibility. The multilingual WebLogic Portal layer is extended to facilitate a Customized Connections component. Customized Connections contain reusable, "Powered by GovBenefits.gov" extensions that seamlessly add functionality to any website, as exemplified by GovLoans.gov another E-Government initiative focused on simplifying loan eligibility and determination. Both components utilize a highly optimized custom-built rules engine component that evaluates logical criteria – in this case, benefit eligibility – based on expressions entered through an intuitive user interface.

The GovBenefits.gov user interface is integrated with the final Vignette Content Management COTS component. It is a custom workflow for content entry, testing, mitigation, and ultimately publishing. The workflow can be tailored per user and security is managed through internal LDAP, where users, groups, and privileges are assigned and maintained. The content management system organizes, presents, secures, and enforces processes for all data so the Federal and State agencies can easily manage information for programs they administer.

Layered hardware architecture hosts the clustered GovBenefits.gov components in a highly available, fault tolerant environment. Metrics are obtained directly from analysis of real Production statistics through *WebTrends* site metrics. Actual frequency, duration, and behavior of users are captured, providing estimates of high and regular usage. This is used to assist in technical analysis as well as drive marketing efforts.

GovBenefits.gov's user interface was recently enhanced to ensure that site visitors of every capability level could easily access the programs appropriate for their needs. By incorporating best practices and feedback from multiple usability tests, GovBenefits.gov created a more flexible and user-friendly website experience. To understand satisfaction on a deeper level, GovBenefits.gov invested in the implementation of the ForeSee Customer Satisfaction survey tool in 2006. Since the rollout, customer satisfaction has increased 10% from the initial base line. While the team has gleaned many insights from this data, there are indications that further improvements are necessary to boost satisfaction especially in the area of the site-search functionality. The execution of a plan to boost customer satisfaction by focusing on the areas of greatest concern has already begun. Changes include the introduction of enhancing the site's key word search function, re-categorizing benefits, improving questionnaire logic and adding help text throughout the site.

## **C. IMPACT**

**Briefly describe the significance of the accomplishment to the agency, its employees, its constituents or the public. What specific benefits, cost-savings, improvements in**

**service resulted from the project? How does it position the agency to be more agile, more cost effective in the future?**

Since its launch in March 2008, SSA BEST has totaled 430,000 citizen visits. Average monthly traffic to SSA BEST totals 124,000 visits. In addition, a total of 38,500 GovDelivery subscriptions have been received for SSA programs. GovDelivery sends program updates to subscribers when a change is made to an SSA BEST page. These numbers reflect ongoing citizen interest in SSA programs and benefit information.

Based on the successful launch of this application, GovBenefits.gov is pursuing additional Customized Connections with other Federal and State agencies to provide the most comprehensive single-source information site to the public. The latest GBCC for the Department of Veterans Affairs is set to launch to the public in December 2008.