NASS Ideas Award Application
Arizona Department of State, Secretary of State Michele Reagan

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Project Title:
Electronic Petition Management System

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Project Description:
The Petition Management System was developed to streamline candidate and ballot measure petitions. The software dramatically reduces processing time by digitally imaging petitions as well as automatically 'marking' the page with a time stamp or sequence number. Most importantly, the system improves transparency through the use of technology making public documents available in an expeditious manner.

General Subject Area:
Elections

History

For more than 100 years Arizonans have enjoyed the ability to propose new laws or amend existing laws by gathering signatures from registered voters to place the issue on the ballot. These citizen initiatives are filed with the Secretary of State at least 4 months prior to the next general election. If it is determined that there is enough valid signatures, the ballot measure is placed on the next general election ballot.

Notably, the first initiative in the state was for women's suffrage which passed overwhelmingly in 1912.

For much of the state's history the verification process has remained relatively unchanged. While determining the validity of signatures are left to political opposition, the Secretary of State's office plays an integral role in the initiative and referendum process.

Once the Secretary of State receives a ballot measure from a political committee the policies and procedures the Elections Division follows are outlined in state law.

The state's previous verification process required staff to perform laborious manual work for nearly a month requiring the hiring of additional temporary employees. The time-consuming processes prevented the timely release of public information and were cost-prohibitive for some political activists seeking to review the validity of the signatures through a public records request.

Collaborating with Runbeck Election Services, the Secretary of State's office launched a petition processing program appropriately named VOCEM or 'Voice' in early 2016.

The state-of-the-art system utilizes high definition scanners which image both sides of the petition while 'marking' the page with a digital time stamp or sequential number simultaneously. Once complete the program routes the image to staff computer terminals for individual review.

Significance

The Petition Management System is another technological accomplishment during Secretary Reagan's tenure as Arizona's 21st Secretary of State. Under her direction the agency has seized opportunities to transform legacy systems and antiquated procedures by adopting a pixels over paper mentality.

Similar to citizens in other parts of the country, Arizonans have come to expect governmental institutions adapt to the digital environment we live in. From voter registration and business filings to shopping at the Arizona Capitol Museum's online store, people enjoy the ability to connect with the Secretary of State's office whether they are at home, work or on mobile device.

While efficiency is a high priority, an equal effort to expand transparency has also been a theme of the administration.

along with numerous other new public filings available online, VOCEM's digital scans of petitions are provided free of charge shortly after the completion of the review process by filing a standard public records request with the Elections Division.

The results have been dramatic. High-tech solutions have optimized efficiency and reduced mind-numbing red tape. No longer is technological advancement limited to private companies with budgets allowing technical exploration and innovation.

Impact/Results

Before	*Now*
Pages – All paper and manual count	Automated scanning and count
Bates number – Manual Stamping	Automatic on paper and digital
Public form disclosure – Days to post	Same day or next morning
Raw count – Many hours	Minutes
Random sampling – Days	Minutes
Sampling extract – Days	1-2 hours
Sampling Public for disclosure – Days	Hours
Redundancy – One original	Paper and digital
Transparency – Slower	Faster

The Petition Management Software processed three initiatives, composed of 86,000 pages. One million petition lines were processed using only 11 temporary staff in those same four weeks. By using Petition Management Software, the state achieved complete Petition Verification 3 times faster than before, reducing costs significantly.

According to the State Elections Division, the software was easy to use and allowed them the capability to print indicia (Bates) numbering on the original petition, proving to be extremely helpful and necessary for auditing and tracking purposes.

From all accounts, the software program is the perfect solution that has streamlined the current petition process, enhancing procedures with accuracy and ease.