Merrill Baumgardner Innovation in Information Technology Award Nomination

1. Award Questions

1. Contact Information of Individual Submitting Nomination

First Name : Mark
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Full Agency Name : Idaho Department of Labor
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2. Title of the project/initiative *(Please create a title if one does not currently exist)*

Interstate Connection Network Relay

3. Provide a brief overview of the project and the significant contribution the named project has made in the field of information technology.

Idaho Department of Labor released the first version of Interstate Connection Network Relay (ICON Relay) in Sept. 2014 for staff to assist claimants with wages from other states, military branches, and federal government agencies. With ICON Relay, Idaho became the first and only state in the nation to interface with ICON using web services across all of ICON's web-enabled message types. Idaho was compliant a full four years before the federal government required modernized states to communicate with ICON using web services for the four real-time ICON message types. However, Idaho began to understand why other modernized states had identified interfacing with ICON as a difficult piece of unemployment system modernization. There are complexities and limitations inherent in communicating with other states that use a mix of mainframe and modernized technology. Idaho discovered that error-prone messages originated from not only mainframe states that do not validate outgoing messages but also modernized states that still send invalid messages.

Much of the daily workload was left to costly developer resources who monitored message arrival queues, performed complex research tasks, and fixed errors in messages manually. The result: multiple-day or multiple-week delays in claim processing for claimants with ex-military, federal agency, or other state wages.

Thus, a software development project began for a new ICON Relay developed by the iUS Consortium's project office at Idaho Department of Labor and funded by the Information Technology Support Center.

In Oct. 2018, Idaho successfully launched the new ICON Relay for daily use by staff. ICON Relay has significantly decreased Idaho's reliance on developers and increased staff productivity.

As a standalone software application, the new ICON Relay is the gatekeeper between Idaho's Internet Unemployment System (iUS) and ICON hub. Its robust preprocessors evaluate each message separately: transmitting valid messages immediately, correcting the vast majority of invalid messages automatically, and stopping only messages with complex errors for staff review. Its simple user interface allows staff to fix errors in messages independently and without confusion. Its subscription-based messaging system creates real-time alerts for all messages to prevent claim processing delays.

During its first two months in use, the new ICON Relay transmitted 109,707 messages of which the preprocessors fixed 44,004 messages. During the same time, only 231 messages were stopped for staff to fix using the new user interface. This ensures that unemployment claims are processed without the delay previously experienced by a much higher volume of invalid messages.

4. Describe the series of accomplishments the nominated State Workforce Agency project has made in information technology over multiple years.

ICON Relay is the first of its kind: using web services for clean communication on every web-service enabled message type in ICON. It is the prime example of a simplified communication method for use between states, federal agencies, and military branches while ensuring properly formatted data transmittals occur to and from mainframe or modernized states.

ICON Relay is poised to interface with any state already using a modernized unemployment system that must now comply with the federal requirement of web-based communication with ICON. Additionally, ICON Relay can integrate with any state still on a mainframe that is beginning its modernization efforts. As a tool used to test communication with ICON hub via web services, ICON Relay can be deployed in a state's development platform one message type at a time or for all message types simultaneously.

Icon Relay is a solid solution to a nationwide problem. The United States Department of Labor and the State of Idaho are working together to make ICON Relay the central mechanism for interstate communication of unemployment claim information.

5. Identify how the nominated State Workforce Agency has contributed to the greater workforce development community as well as your state.

Idaho Department of Labor began its modernization effort with the release of Internet Unemployment System (iUS) in 2014. The National Association of State Chief Information Officers awarded Idaho for significantly improving state government operations in 2015.

The team continued creating new applications, including Employer Portal and Claimant Portal for self-service unemployment account management; Liens to communicate with the Idaho Secretary of State; Reemployment Services and Eligibility Assessments to schedule in-person interviews with claimants; Repay to establish payment agreements and wage garnishments; Fictitious Actor to discover identity theft; DocWriter to compile appeal hearing decisions; and Employer Audit for real-time field audits.

The significance of Idaho Department of Labor's work reaches beyond the state's unemployment insurance program. As the founder and lead state of the iUS Consortium, Idaho remains at the forefront of unemployment system modernization. The consortium's purpose is to pioneer modernization efforts alongside other states using the core systems of iUS, Claimant Portal, Employer Portal, and ICON Relay. Instead of building entirely new systems for each state, the core system is combined with a state's law-driven requirements. This approach reduces the cost and complexity of modernization, providing a viable option that places modernization within reach of states nationwide.

6. Provide samples of work including creative materials, videos, graphics, documents, plans, etc. regarding the efforts and results you outlined in questions #3 and #4.
(File limit: 10 | 10 MB limit per file)

ICONRELAY_Screenshots.docx
ICONRelayPressRelease_(002).docx

7. Please upload a copy of the email or document with your state agency administrator's approval.
(File limit: 2 | 10 MB limit per file)

NASWA_AWARD_-_Director_Approval.pdf