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2014 VACo Achievement Awards

Deadline: June 2, 2014

Application Form

All applications must include the following information. Separate applications must be submitted for each eligible program. **Deadline: June 2, 2014.**

Program Information

Locality Stafford County
Program Title MyStafford Citizen Portal
Program Category Information Technology

Contact Information

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Signature of county administrator or chief administrative officer

Name Laura M. Rudy
Title County Treasurer
Signature Laura M Rudy

2014 VACo Achievement Awards

MyStafford Citizen Portal

Stafford County Treasurer's Office

Overview

The Stafford County Treasurer's Office, Department of Utilities, and Virginia Interactive (VI) teamed up to launch the new myStafford Citizen Portal. The portal is an online bill presentment and payment solution that simplifies the user experience by allowing payments and tracking of various bills online in a single convenient location. Citizens can view and pay their bills online, 24/7, and receive email notifications when bills are available. This enterprise e-billing and payment offering is a next generation solution that has evolved from Stafford's previous achievements with providing online payments for utilities customers. The portal was designed to keep pace with changing social habits, shifting demographics, evolving citizen demands and emerging technologies. Additional key features include:

- Create a secure account for facilitating future transactions
- Enrollment for electronic notifications and go green e-billing
- View billing and payment history for each account
- Enable users to update billing address and phone number
- Secure, credit card and e-check payment options
- Provide option for one-time payments (citizens who choose not to establish an a account)
- Integration enabling citizens to donate to Stafford Safety Net program
- Provide robust administrative and reporting tools for the County

Launched in August 2013 and was quickly adopted by over 4,000 citizens with more than 15,000 bills paid in the first three months. Over 1,500 users also elected for e-billing with both the Department of Utilities and the Treasurer's Office, realizing immediate cost savings of over \$17,000 annually from reduced production and distribution of printed bills, traditional mailings and manual payments processed.

Date Launched: August 5, 2013

Demo URL: <https://devnet.windows.vipnet.org/Demo/StaffordDemo/>

Citizen Account: user / Password1. (case sensitive and there is a period at the end)
Admin Account: admin / Password1. (case sensitive and there is a period at the end)

Problem, Challenge, or Situation Faced

Citizens of the County wanted an easy way to view and pay their bills online from the convenience of their home or on the go via mobile device.

The Stafford County Treasurer's Office, responsible for managing all payments across the County, processes extremely large transaction volumes daily. The Treasurer's Office is also responsible for collecting Personal Property Tax payments, Real Estate Tax payments, and Dog License fees. Though the County offered online payments, customers could only look up and pay their bills through siloed services, usually only after they received the printed bills in the mail. The process was cumbersome for both citizens and the County.

Prior to the launch of the myStafford Citizen Portal, the Stafford County Department of Utilities mailed water and sewer bills to approximately 2,000 customers per day, totaling over 400,000 per year. The costs for creating, updating and processing bills demonstrated the need for web-based services to streamline the existing manual process.

Departmental collaboration coupled with the implementation of a bill presentment and payment website, enabled customers to view and pay their different bills online with a single login, bringing convenience and ease to the citizen and significant efficiency gains and cost savings to Stafford County.

The new online process significantly improves efficiencies by reducing manual data re-entry, paper and mailing costs. The added benefit allows staff to redeploy their time to other collection activities and improve daily work flows for both the Treasurer's Office and the Department of Utilities.

Innovation

Stafford County was an early adopter of online services and billing payments. However, in so doing, individual payments services were implemented for each department and payment type requiring individual account lookups and data entry each time a payment was to be made.

The myStafford Citizen Portal replaces these payment services spanning multiple departments with a user centric enterprise solution that allows citizens to establish a single online access account which can then be associated with their individual billing accounts. The profile based access contributes to a highly usable citizen experience, enabling the user to enter, review and verify submissions without having to re-

enter common data. Unique in local government, this cross boundary approach demonstrates exceptional intergovernmental collaboration and leadership.

Collaboration and a Model for Other Localities

The myStafford Citizen Portal is a result of collaboration between the Treasurer's Office, Department of Utilities, Department of Information Technology, SafetyNet Program and Virginia Interactive. While the concept of the portal was initiated by the Treasurer's Office we recognized that expanding the approach of the project enterprise wide would benefit many different departments. As a result a cross functional project team was formed to advise, direct, and implement the new portal.

The speed to market and low development costs were key program requirements. This was accomplished with a fluid development process that accommodated iterative design process. Staged application development and phased implementation made possible a much earlier start than otherwise would have been practical while still allowing for application refinements to the portal. This development and implementation process is well suited and repeatable for other Virginia localities wishing to provide similar services.

The myStafford Citizen Portal has risen to the challenge of bringing new and innovative features to citizens of the County, while ensuring the chosen technologies adhere to security and privacy best practices. Usage rates have exceeded initial expectations and are expected to increase as more citizens' sign up for the service as a result of multichannel marketing campaign including print, online and social media messaging throughout 2014. In addition, the Stafford County Commissioner of Revenue will be included in the next phase and will include business license and meals tax payments. Several other counties throughout the Commonwealth have also requested demonstrations of the services.

Implementation

The myStafford Citizen Portal was designed, developed, and implemented with zero upfront cost to the County. The initial development, customer support and ongoing maintenance are provided by Virginia

Interactive, LLC, using a self-funded transactional model whereby a small service fee is charged per transaction. The only hard costs to the County are for the normal merchant and ACH fees charged by the processing banks in order to be able to accept credit and debit card payments and e-check payments.

Projected Development Timeline:	5 Months
Actual Development Timeline:	5 Months
Cost:	\$0 – The service is funded through transaction fees
Soft Target Launch Date:	08/05/2013
Launch Date:	08/05/2013

Results

The new myStafford Citizen Portal is a defining element to Stafford County's commitment to citizen-centric service delivery and convenience. The portal has now become the first impression a citizen has with the County. As a result, the team was committed to creating a portal that reflects a user-friendly, intuitive, best-in-class enterprise features that uniquely reflect the County's personality.

Citizens are given an online experience with the portal unlike any they have known from Stafford County before. The citizens have access to their utilities account information 24 hours a day and 7 days a week, to view bills and balances due, make payments, and maintain basic changes outside of normal business hours.

"Just wanted to say thanks for the new online water payment option! Nice to save a buck, and be able to set up an account for easier sign in. I really appreciate it." – Sam Houchins, myStafford user

"The new system is great! I don't have to remember my account number every time I want to make a payment online. Plus, now it's fee free for e-check payments!" – Diane Pape, myStafford user

Benefits to the Department of Utilities include the costs savings of e-billing as opposed to mailing bills, and also quicker notification of online payments. This is particularly helpful in the realm of delinquent

accounts which are scheduled to have their utilities turned off for non-payment. The Department of Utilities is instantaneously notified of any online payment towards accounts that are in jeopardy of having their water service disconnected. Furthermore, this provides the Department of Utilities a more efficient use of their resources.

- Launched in August 2013, over 4,000 citizens registered their utilities account(s) with the portal in the first three months with 1,500 signing up to receive e-notifications.
- As of March 2014, there were nearly 6,000 registered citizens including 2,100 e-bill customers consistently making over 6,000 utility payment transactions per month over month through the portal.
- It costs the Department of Utilities roughly \$0.61 to produce, print and mail utility bills. The Department of Utilities currently has over 2,326 who are now active e-bill customers which directly translates into a saving of over \$1,400 in monthly billing costs. The new solution accounts for annual cost savings of over \$17,000.
- On average, the Treasurer's Office saves \$1.00 in manual payment processing costs, per online transaction.
- Since the launch of the portal, the Treasurer's Office has seen the per month average in online utilities transactions increase by about 1,000. Therefore, the Treasurer's Office is saving approximately \$1,000 per month in manual payment processing costs, equivalent to \$12,000 annual savings.
- As more users adopt e-billing, the Department of Utilities will see a decrease in the production and postage of paper utilities bills, and as more customers pay online, the Treasurer's Office will enjoy reduced manual payment processing costs, saving valuable time and resources for both departments.
- Since the integration of the Stafford Safety Net donations program, the County has experienced over 1,200 online donations, totaling more than \$3,500 towards the Stafford Safety Net program. Prior to the launch of the portal, the County was receiving 55 monthly donations on average per month. The average number of monthly donations jumped to 68, helping to increase the amount of funds being donated to the program. This is a 25% monthly increase in donations.

Contact Information

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