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Final Copy of Case Study

LOCATION:
Olney, MD, US

ORGANIZATION:
U.S. Department of Energy Loan Programs Office

YEAR:
2011

ORGANIZATION URL:
<http://lpo.energy.gov/>

STATUS:
Laureate

PROJECT NAME:
Loan Guarantee Program Application

CATEGORY:
Environment

PROJECT OVERVIEW

The U.S. Department of Energy's (DOE) Loan Programs Office (LPO) is one of the federal government's principal vehicles for increasing the supply of clean energy in the United States. LPO (See Appendix 1) achieves this goal by issuing low-cost, long-tenor loans and loan guarantees to accelerate the commercial deployment of innovative and advanced technologies at a scale sufficient to contribute meaningfully to the achievement of our national clean energy objectives. The loan programs reflect the Administration's commitment to investing in clean energy sources that will create jobs, enhance American competitiveness in the global economy and lay the foundation for the nation's long-term energy security. LPO conducts a rigorous underwriting process for each project to ensure that taxpayer funds are efficiently deployed and adequately protected, and that each loan has a reasonable prospect of repayment. In order to conduct the underwriting process effectively, applicants must first submit highly detailed and often sensitive project and sponsor information. In the past, project sponsors may have taken days, even weeks, preparing necessary documents by either sending them via mail or submitting them through an unreliable legacy system. These methods were often cumbersome, confusing for the applicant and time-consuming for DOE staff reviewing the applications. In an effort to improve efficiencies and provide greater transparency, DOE automated the Loan Programs Office's application and approval process, cutting down the application time from several days or weeks to less than one business day. DOE was able to expedite the application process by replacing the old system, which comprised of a series of highly manual steps of data collection and review to a 100 percent Web-based, automated portal with front-end data collection and back-end review automation (See Appendix 1). The newly streamlined and intuitive LPO online application portal has resulted in expedited reviews, greater communication between applicants and LPO, and greater visibility to both project sponsors and LPO staff. The innovative online portal has had a tremendous impact on review time, significantly reducing initial eligibility reviews from 30-45 days to less than 10 days. Where paper was once ubiquitous, the portal is now the standard means of application

submission, review and validation. DOE had an aggressive two-month timeframe to launch the portal, which meant strategic planning and strong public/private collaboration between DOE and its technology partners were essential to the project's success. DOE also leveraged the right blend of technologies to automate the former manual application processes, including a Business Process Management technology suite and Document Management.

SOCIETAL BENEFITS

The online portal streamlined the application process, paving the way for more quality clean energy projects to receive government financing and facilitating additional job creation, decreased dependence on oil and the deployment of some of the world's largest and most impactful clean energy projects to date.

PROJECT BENEFIT EXAMPLE

The online portal was designed to make the application process clear, concise, easy and intuitive for applicants. DOE engaged with numerous industry professionals and stakeholders in designing the portal. Since its launch, the Loan Programs Office has received positive feedback from the main audience it serves. Here is an example: "I was skeptical about the DOE's new online portal heading into the submission process for the Part I application, but having filed two other applications using the old system, I found the new portal to be user-friendly and efficient, and it did not place a big burden on my team's time and resources. The new online portal eliminated most of the duplication from the old format, and it made it easier to see each section and attachment and make adjustments before submitting. Big improvement." Jonathan Plowe, Managing Director, Bank of America Merrill Lynch

IS THIS PROJECT AN INNOVATION, BEST PRACTICE? Yes

ADDITIONAL PROJECT INFORMATION

Exemplary Project Management/Solution Implementation In order to meet the Loan Program Office's aggressive two-month project timeline, the project team made four critical decisions to ensure the project's success: •Creating a team of senior, experienced professionals. The DOE portal project is as much about streamlining business processes as it is creating an engaging user experience, which is why seasoned professionals were engaged to ask the right kinds of questions and manage the scope of work so that expectations were met. •Co-locating the staff. In order to meet the aggressive two-month timeline, team members were co-located to streamline communication and help facilitate cross pollination of skills and knowledge sharing. •Changing the management processes. The project team created two "buckets" for change management: immediate requirements and deferred items, so that the team could prioritize action items and ensure the project was implemented and executed on time. •Identifying and leveraging the right technology tools. The project team identified a tool suite allowing extreme flexibility with forms development, forms tied together with the process model, and a fully exposed API layer and seamless integration with SharePoint. HandySoft's Bizflow® BPM Suite met all of these requirements. Strategic planning combined with the implementation of a flexible product suite enabled the project team to deliver the enterprise portal on time, with more than 150 percent of initial design functionality. Additional Benefits Realized Not only does the portal make the loan guarantee application process easier to navigate, the portal also demonstrates DOE's commitment to accelerate



important clean energy investments that create jobs, support private markets and transform the way we use and produce energy. Below are examples of portal enhancements that were key to the project's success:

- The portal's design guides sponsors through the application process by making suggestions for relevant solicitations based on the information the applicant has provided. In addition, an online glossary helps define terms for project sponsors, making the solicitation easier to understand.
- Documents submitted for each application are accessible online for collaboration and review (See Appendix 2). These enhancements significantly reduce the costs of both submitting and reviewing applications.
- Sponsors now have instantaneous guidance as to how they might increase the likelihood that their project will continue to the next phase. Sponsors immediately know whether or not their information has been accepted, and just as importantly, whether their application meets very general eligibility parameters.
- Comprehensive security features such as encryption algorithms and password protection to ensure that only the applicant and identified department reviewers can access appropriate files.