

# Arkansas Cuts Time from Procurement Process

BY: [Hilton Collins](#) | May 30, 2012

Kurtis Markish breathes easier these days. As a buyer in the Arkansas Office of State Procurement (OSP), his work has been simplified, thanks to the state's online contract and amendment submission application, an electronic workflow that saves agencies time and money when compared to the previous paper-based system.

"If there was ever a question, you had to manually search through file cabinet after file cabinet of archives to find out what you had," he said. "It just got to the point, with the increase of growth and government, that we needed a far superior way to see this process off."

State law requires professional and consultant service contracts of more than \$25,000 to be reviewed by the Arkansas Legislative Council, but pushing paper to handle roughly 2,000 contracts annually became too laborious. The new system, which went live in spring 2010, lets state agencies submit online contracts and supporting documents in PDF and Microsoft Word or Excel format. The agencies can log into the system to track a document's status and receive digital approvals.

The OSP estimates that the electronic workflow cuts paper usage by 117,000 pages a year, and reduces Professional Consultant Services (PCS) contract processing time from three months to less than six weeks.

Before the PCS process went online, state agencies had a tough time tracking contracts. "They never knew the status of the contract. There were so many unanswered questions," said OSP Director Jane Benton.

## A Time-Saving Process

Today, more than 200 government entities can access the online submission application. Contracts worth less than \$25,000 that don't require legislative review can be examined and approved within minutes. Larger contracts are automatically routed through an electronic workflow. Agencies enter required information on a Web application form, which is reviewed first by the OSP, and then routed to other appropriate reviewers. Each reviewer may reject, approve or flag the application for further study. Reviewing agencies are emailed when a contract or amendment is ready for them, and they can reject a submission before the legislative council ever sees it. When contracts go before the council in the final step, council members review the submission within 30 days of receipt and notify the OSP.

Users can click a link on Arkansas Department of Finance and Administration website to search for contract data. The application lets them view text information or generate spreadsheets.

"They just download a data file and it's imported into their database where it just takes a few seconds. Now they have all the information at their fingertips," Markish said.

## Improvement On the Past

Neither Benton nor Markish could comment on a specific dollar amount Arkansas had saved because of the new process, but they know that the old way required more cost in employee time; paper, envelope, messenger and postage expenses; filing space; and storage. The new system has reduced envelope usage by 97 percent.

In the old days, the vendor and an agency signed a contract, someone copied the document and any attachments, and both copies were mailed or sent by courier to the OSP. An amendment to an existing contract created even more paper: People completed an amendment form, copied it and any attachments, and sent a copy of that amendment and all previous amendments to the OSP.

The procurement office reviewed each original copy and amendment for accuracy and entered pertinent data into 25 fields on a spreadsheet. Staff sent copies of the contracts to the Bureau of Legislative Review: a hard copy each of the original contract, every amendment and the history of those amendments. Bureau employees entered data from this material into their own database, and the contract awaited legislative review for approval. A contract was

labeled “executed” if approved. After the review, contracts and amendments were returned to the OSP, and the office filed executed contracts and amendments while the originals were returned to the agency that originally submitted them.

Benton has worked for Arkansas for six years, and this process was firmly in place when she started the job. “There was so much time spent chasing paper. They spent an inordinate amount of time just looking for things instead of actual work,” she said.

But today’s electronic process overhauled that workload, and it’s eliminated the need to repeatedly re-enter the same data, so there are fewer clerical errors. “Every time you rekey something, not only is it a waste of time, but the error margin also increases,” Benton said. “There were three or four steps where people were rekeying the same data.”

Various groups teamed up to develop the online submission system in-house. The Department of Finance and Administration’s IT group worked with the Information Network of Arkansas and NIC, the provider of the Arkansas.gov portal. They developed the tool in PHP on a MySQL database, and the data is stored on the Arkansas.gov server. Developers designed it to integrate with EMC Documentum ApplicationXtender, so documents are transferred via XML for content management and storage purposes.

Markish is thankful for the changes. The room for mistakes was just too large in the old days. “So many chances for error, from lost contracts to mistyped information,” he said. “There just had to be a faster way to do things.”

This article was printed from: <http://www.govtech.com/budget-finance/Arkansas-Cuts-Time-from-Procurement-Process.html>