

DRAFT 1

Policy Package #XXX

Implement AskOregon Service on the Oregon.gov Website to Improve Citizen Access to Government Information

Purpose

Since 2002, the Oregon State Library has collaborated with DAS E-Government to operate the search engine on the Oregon.gov website. This partnership works extremely well, merging the research and government information expertise of State Library staff with the technology planning and implementation expertise of E-Government. The average daily traffic on the search box has increased from 1,745 in FY2003 to 6,375 in FY2007. During this time, the amount of Oregon government information delivered through Oregon.gov has increased significantly (55% in the past fifteen months), as have citizen expectations of online information.

Several states have explored making additional information support available on their websites. AskOregon would be a unique, multi-platform support solution that includes online chat, email, adaptable FAQs, and a knowledge base. Implementing this service would leverage the existing partnership between E-Government, the State Library, and the appropriate information and publication contacts at all state agencies. As with the search engine, E-Government would provide the software platform and the State Library would provide the staffing and expertise to respond to inquiries, including the technical experience built up during five years of search engine administration.

The State Library is the logical agency to administer this service. State Library staff are information professionals, trained in research and information retrieval. This includes a significant amount of research with, for, and about state government. It also includes the administration of the Oregon Documents Depository program. Through this program, State Library staff have strong connections with publishers and documents liaisons at all agencies as well as a clear understanding of what information agencies are publishing. This information is increasingly available online; in the first quarter of the 2007 – 2009 Biennium, the State Library distributed 198 print titles from agencies but added 263 electronic publications to the online archive. The more agencies provide their information online, the more citizens will expect robust online tools to support inquiries about that information.

Oregon State Library staff also participate in L-Net, the chat and email reference service staffed by libraries around the state. This experience has helped the Library build experience and capacity in responding to chat reference inquiries. From January to July 2007, 10% of L-Net email traffic has been referred to the State Library as inquiries about Oregon government. The AskOregon service would provide citizens a focused, highly visible channel for getting the answers they need about state government, regardless of their geographic location or access to local library services.

The Colorado State Library currently operates a search box similar to the one administered by the Oregon State Library. This search box receives similar traffic to Oregon's. In January 2006, Colorado launched an online chat reference service for state government information. In the first seven months of 2007, this service received 7,455 inquiries. It has experienced a steady growth, with just over 600 inquiries in January and over 1,500 in July. Search engine and general Colorado.gov web traffic have remained steady over this same period. This experience indicates a clear interest on the part of citizens to have multiple online paths to government information.

With its enterprise-wide approach to web publication and search administration, Oregon is well-situated to implement a service that meets citizens' needs and expectations. The software under consideration would allow citizens to place information requests via email or online chat. It would also allow Library staff to manage sophisticated online tools such as automated frequently asked questions and a knowledge base. Inquiries that come in outside of the AskOregon link could be added to the system, making answers available online as library staff find and document them. AskOregon would provide a clear link next to the search box on the Oregon.gov website for inquiries of all types. State Library staff would provide first-tier support for these inquiries and would collaborate with agencies to provide second-tier support and the online tools (such as FAQs).

How Will AskOregon Be Achieved?

To implement this new service, the State Library Board has proposed Policy Package #XXX, requesting the necessary funding to effectively staff and administer AskOregon. DAS E-Government is pursuing the necessary software through its budgetary process.

Results from this option package would be:

- Increased resources and options for citizens seeking Oregon government information;
- Improved ability to respond to inquiries in the style and format preferred by the citizen;
- More comprehensive, centralized, and cohesive resources for answering frequently asked questions about Oregon government;
- A predictable, high-quality channel for citizens to use to get information when visiting Oregon.gov;
- Increased collaboration between agencies in providing information about their services; and
- A robust, centralized repository of information about state government available to everyone.

Statistical tools in place at the State Library and included in the proposed software solution will allow for effective measurement of these results.