



2008
Outstanding Program Awards

Application Form

Program Title: Iowa School Alerts

Check one: Individual State Award State & Private Sector Partnership

If applicable, identify Private Partner

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Application Process

When preparing and entering your submission, please follow these guidelines:

1. The application form is available online at www.nasca.org.
2. All submissions must be submitted electronically by emailing the information to nasca@csg.org. If you have any questions, contact NASCA staff by email at nasca@csg.org or by phone at 859-244-8181.
3. Adobe Acrobat (PDF) documents will **not** be accepted.
4. More than one program may be submitted from the same entity.
5. Deadline: All submissions must be received by April 1, 2008.

Program Questions

Please provide a one (1)-page summary of the program. Provide a narrative answer for each question listed below. You are limited to two (2) pages, based on regular 8 ½ by 11 inch paper, single spaced in 12 point font. The two page limit does not include the one-page summary. Do **not** send supporting documentation.

1. How long has the program been operational?
2. What was the program's start-up cost? Provide detailed information about specific purchases for this program, including staffing needs and other expenditures, as well as existing materials, technology and staff already in place.
3. What are the program's operational costs?
4. How is the program funded?
5. How do you calculate actual savings, i.e., short-term and/or long-term?
6. How do you measure this program's success? Provide quantitative benefits realized by service recipients, taxpayers and/or state agencies?
7. How has the program grown or changed since its implementation?
8. Describe the program's applicability to other states/local/federal governments?



Iowa School Alerts Program Summary

Iowa School Alerts is a web-based application developed by the Iowa Department of Administrative Services (DAS) that provides school administrators with a secure, single point of access to initiate the notification process for various school closing events. Notifications are sent via e-mail or short message service to registered media outlets, parents, and other caregivers when schools must close, dismiss early, or start late due to weather or other factors. The notifications are also available as a Rich Site Summary (RSS) feed subscriptions for media, community, school-related organizations, and individuals that wish to see a comprehensive list of school closings.

The Iowa School Alerts design leverages the high societal adoption rates of internet connected personal computers and personal digital communications devices (i.e. digital phones, wireless e-mail devices, other personal communication systems) connected by an extensive wireless network throughout Iowa. DAS used an established and proven in-house authentication and authorization (A&A) application and applied our in-depth knowledge of government operations and citizen-facing web applications to develop Iowa School Alerts.

The Iowa School Alerts website (<https://schoolalerts.iowa.gov/>) provides a secure web-based enrollment service driven by the state developed A&A application for those wishing to receive school closing notifications. Subscriptions to the service are self-administered and updated by participants online. A single account can enroll for notifications from any of the participating schools. The Iowa School Alerts home page also contains a list of the most current notifications, which can be accessed from any internet connected browser.

The objective of Iowa School Alerts was to dramatically improve the efficiency of the school closing notification process. Traditionally, such notifications required the school administrator and several staff from 1 to 2 hours to make such notifications, depending on the size of the school and reason for notification. The list of phone numbers to be called in the event of such notification typically ran to several dozen and, for most parents, the school relied on parents receiving notification from radio and television announcements. It also improves the efficiency of the notifications received. The school closing notification services offered by certain radio and television stations were confined to the larger media markets and were unavailable to rural school districts. They would only allow parents to register for alerts on a school district basis, resulting in multiple notifications to parents who had to read and reject notices not pertaining to the specific school buildings they were interested in.

Within minutes of the decision to close a school early, school administrators can use Iowa School Alerts to make all of the required notifications to a larger number of interested parties in less time and with fewer staff. The same notification message is sent to all interested parties via email, TaskTicker (a small program which runs in the computer's taskbar and pops up an instant message on the computer screen), or a Rich Site Summary (RSS) feed for sites that wish to aggregate the notifications the Schools Out ticker system provides. The messages are customizable and can contain information specific to the event requiring the closing. The service is available at no cost to every school district and school building in the State of Iowa, regardless of population. The notifications are available at no cost to every interested party (i.e. media, parents, caregivers, transportation companies, etc.) and delivers information on a school building by school building basis. This significant improvement in communication gives greater peace of mind to parents and provides the social benefit of improving the safety and well being of our children.



2008 NASCA Outstanding Awards Program Questions

Iowa School Alerts

1. How long has the program been operational?

Iowa School Alerts was piloted in the last half of the 2006-2007 school year and was fully deployed for the 2007-2008 school year.

2. What was the program's start-up cost? Provide detailed information about specific purchases for this program, including staffing needs and other expenditures, as well as existing materials, technology and staff already in place.

The startup cost for application coding and testing were \$105,000. Iowa School Alerts uses the Lyris List Manager 9.0 for transmitting notifications and relies on IBM Websphere Application Server and MySQL for the enrollment and management processes. Existing staff were used to develop and deploy the application. The coding and testing of the application was done by state staff.

3. What are the program's operational costs?

The total annual operational cost is \$24,140. This includes:

- Web hosting - \$8,640.
- Enterprise user authentication and authorization services - \$3,000.
- Ongoing programming enhancements and maintenance - \$7,500.
- Web service client improvements - \$5,000.

4. How is the program funded?

Funding has been provided by the IOWAccess Revolving Fund. IOWAccess is a state program created to promote and support a wide range of e-Government services to citizens.

5. How do you calculate actual savings, i.e., short-term and/or long-term?

Based on the current number of school districts using Iowa School Alerts, we conservatively calculate the savings by assuming 2 hours of school administration staff time (2.0 FTEs times 1 hour / FTE) per notification (without Iowa School Alerts) at a fully loaded cost of \$25

/ hour times 2,000 notifications statewide per school year = \$100,000 annually. From this we subtract the cost associated with using Iowa School Alerts which is calculated by assuming 15 minutes of staff time per notification at a fully loaded cost of \$25 / hour times 2,000 notifications statewide per school year = \$12,500 annually. The difference is an annual savings of \$87,500.

6. How do you measure this program's success? Provide quantitative benefits realized by service recipients, taxpayers and/or state agencies?

Iowa School Alerts has been adopted by 175 school districts (including 7 private schools and 2 Area Education Agencies) statewide covering 595 individual school buildings. This represents just over half of the school districts in Iowa. Through January 2008, there were 5,852 registered users and 21,654 subscribers. The application has processed a total of 597 notifications requiring 40,062 e-mails.

7. How has the program grown or changed since its implementation?

Originally, the intent was to provide only an e-mail notification service. Once testing was completed with the pilot school districts, the application supported three ways for staff, parents, guardians, daycare providers and the media to get notifications:

- Email Alerts - Interested parties can choose to receive email notices when a school or district they are interested in closes.
- TaskTicker - TaskTicker is a tiny program which runs in your computer's taskbar. When one of the chosen schools or districts closes, an instant message pops up on the enrollee's computer screen.
- RSS Feed – The Iowa School Alerts website provides a Rich Site Summary (RSS) feed for sites that wish to aggregate the notifications the Iowa School Alerts ticker system provides. This is a great way for the media and school related organizations to publish notifications on their own websites.

8. Describe the program's applicability to other states/local/federal governments?

The program can be adapted to work for organizations of various sizes needing to provide electronic tailored, real-time notifications to constituent groups. The limitations on the number of notifications is constrained by the Lyris List Manager software and the information technology infrastructure on which it is deployed.