

NACRC website article
Submitted by:
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ELECTRONIC SYSTEMS IMPROVE LOCAL POLICY-MAKING PROCESSES

County clerks responsible for preparing, publishing, and preserving official records of the acts of their local governing bodies can benefit from the application of modern technology in the form of a customizable, turn-key program called a legislative tracking system. With only a few keystrokes and clicks of the mouse, these systems allow clerks to boost employee productivity, reduce operating costs, gain greater control over local policy (legislative) processes, and—most importantly—significantly increase public accessibility to the legal and historical information about their communities.

In a session conducted as part of its annual conference in Hawaii this past July, the National Association of County Recorders, Election Officials & Clerks (NACRC) welcomed representatives from Chicago-based Daystar Computer Systems, Inc. and Public Systems Associates, Inc. (PSA), from Baton Rouge, who discussed the many benefits of offered by legislative tracking systems.

As John Cichon, Daystar's general manager, pointed out:

“For the county clerk, these systems make the responsibility of managing board or commission records exactly what it should be—a simple task accomplished with the speed and power of the computer. From the public perspective, it enables the clerk's office to be what it strives to be—a convenient, reliable source of thorough, accurate, and readily available information.”

T. Thao Hill, chief technology officer with PSA, added:

“Having a community's most important legal and historical records available and accessible is a mission-critical function of the clerk's office, and the power of today's technology—including the power of the Internet—has increased citizen expectation for almost immediate access to information from their local government in a 24/7 basis.”

For the clerk—serving as “proxy of the people”—the implications of these powerful systems is phenomenal.

“By leveraging current database technology, combined with Internet delivery, county clerks are able to meet growing public demands and expectations while still complying with federal and state laws and sunshine requirements,” Cichon said. “In today's world, the public wants information faster, more completely, in more formats, and with a higher level of accuracy than ever before. Legislative tracking systems give clerks the power to meet those expectations.”

Cichon also reported that his company had conducted a survey of some of its clients which indicated an annual cost savings between \$4,200 and \$175,000 for printing, overtime, and direct expenses. In addition, an average annual staff time savings of about 1,735 hours was achieved—the equivalent of a full-time position.

“Overall, the average payback on this investment is less than two years, and in many cases less than one year,” Cichon said.

“The efficient management of information gives some communities a key strategic advantage over others when competing for potential residents and businesses, and it’s absolutely vital to the success of any policymaking body,” Hill said. “The automation of local policy processes is helping to transform local government bodies into more efficient and effective institutions and, in the process, we’re disposing of the ‘white plague’ of paperwork.”