



State of Vermont

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James C. Condos, Secretary of State

Christopher D. Winters, Deputy Secretary

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TO: Stephen Klein, Joint Fiscal Office
FR: Chris Winters, Deputy Secretary of State
RE: Vermont Business Portal Funding

Overview

The Vermont Business Portal Project is a legislative initiative enacted in 2018. It would replace and enhance the existing Secretary of State, Department of Tax, and Department of Labor web portals and would add ACCD, with the goal of simplifying the business registration process and assisting small businesses by:

- Delivering a **single point-of-entry**;
- Providing an **easy-to-use, customer-focused interface** that will **unify government systems**;
- Enabling **one-time data entry** that will pre-populate across agency forms;
- Providing a **guided walkthrough** of requirements;
- Allowing **one payment** to be submitted to the state; and
- Accessing **support when it's needed** the most.

The Business Portal Team has been seeking an appropriation of \$2M to complete Phase 1 of the project, outlined below.

This project was on track to begin in July 2020 to be completed no later than the end of calendar year 2020, pending the funding appropriation. Once the foundation is replaced with a Sales Force based solution in 2020, it will make additional onboarding of other state licensing and permitting functionality over the course of coming months and years a reality.

COVID Connection

Over the last three months, we can clearly see how an enhanced Business Portal would have been extremely helpful to our COVID-19 response as a state. The Business Portal would:

- Create a critically important business database and avenue for **communication with all registered businesses and business types**;
- Bring more transactions online to **facilitate remote work**;
- Create **employee and agency efficiency** at a time of concerning revenue loss;

- Promote **small business development** by simplifying interactions with the state in a difficult economy and at a time when relief is so desperately needed;
- Make much-needed state, federal, private and nonprofit **resources and information** more readily available; and
- House business relief **applications and tracking** of CRF grants as they are awarded.

Budget

With the \$1M appropriation that was in the budget until now, plus approximately \$500K in the revolving IT fund and with the \$175K left over from VTSOS appropriations last year still held by VTSOS, the Business Portal Steering Committee (Secretary of State, Secretary of the Agency of Digital Services, and Secretary of the Agency of Commerce and Community Development) was preparing to rebuild and greatly improve the existing Portal, but was still seeking additional funding for an approximate \$2M price tag for Portal Phase 1.

Phase 1 is to be completed by the end of Calendar Year 2020:

- Building a new foundation for the Business Portal on the Salesforce platform;
- New and streamlined online business registration forms for the Secretary of State, Department of Labor, and Department of Taxes;
- Adding the Agency of Commerce and Community Development to the Portal, including a customer relationship management system to match business with available resources at ACCD
- Guided navigation through each agency process with assistance available at every step;
- The ability for businesses to see in-progress applications, statuses, and communications via a dashboard;
- A single payment process allowing the business to make one payment to the State for fees incurred, instead of multiple payments to each agency
- Data sharing and improved coordination for State employees across agency boundaries
- A master database of businesses and business contacts for the State of Vermont
- A unique ID for each registered business
- With the potential addition of COVID relief applications and grant tracking

As stated above, this project and the Steering Committee overseeing it was the creation of the Legislature and has the full support of the Administration. ADS has assigned staff to the project, including:

- A Project Manager
- A Business Analyst
- An Enterprise Architect

Upon funding, the State expects to sign a contract and begin work immediately and is already working on contract terms. Work has already begun under a non-binding prototyping session. The Team has completed the 8-week prototyping process and is very pleased with the vendor and the prototype.

In Calendar Year 2021, the Team expects to transition to Phases 2 with the next most desirable services small business would like to see in a One-Stop Portal. The Team would begin gathering requirements in early 2021 and would be seeking an additional appropriation for that work in FY22, depending on the scope, complexity and effort involved.

Conclusion

With a \$2M appropriation, the Business Portal Team is confident we can accomplish Phase 1 of the Business Portal project quickly and in any case no later than the end of 2020, which will result in great benefit to Vermonters and Vermont businesses in their time of need.

I would be happy to answer any questions the committee may have and can facilitate testimony or answers from any of the Business Portal Team.