

Nebraska State  
Records Board  
440 So. 8th, Suite 210  
Lincoln, NE 68508  
(402) 471-2745

John Gale  
Chairman



**APPLICATION FOR STATE RECORDS BOARD GRANT  
TO IMPROVE ACCESS TO PUBLIC INFORMATION**  
(State Agency Grant Application)

State Agencies desiring grants from the Nebraska State Records Board for projects to improve access to state government information should complete this application and follow any procedures outlined in this application and any accompanying materials.

I. Grant Summary

1. Name of agency applying for grant Nebraska State Treasurer

2. Title of project NebraskaSpending.com

3. Brief Description of Project

The core functionality of NebraskaSpending.com is to act as a searchable database that allows the general public to access a wealth of government spending information like state expenditures, revenues, budgets, and even the average local property tax. There will be a Google-type search engine where users can browse payment information for goods and services by category, vendor, and contract. We will also incorporate flash technology to create interactive pie charts and bar graphs to reveal State spending habits in a simple and easy-to-read fashion.

3. Grant request amount \$ 50,000.00

4. Will there be a fee for accessing records associated with this project? No

5. If yes, provide any statutory reference or authorization for the fee \_\_\_\_\_

**II. Grant Detail**

**1. Please describe the project in detail (you may attach this description)**

See attached

**2. Please describe whom the beneficiary or recipient of this service will be and projected activity for access or use of the proposed service**

See attached

**3. Timeline for implementation (specific completion date must be provided, grant funds lapse if not expended prior to completion date).**

Anticipated completion date is January 1, 2008

**4. Agency contribution to project (labor, equipment etc.)**

See attached

**5. Has this project ever been submitted as a budget request (explain)?**

No

**6. Does the project require additional statutory authority (explain)?**

**7. Why is the grant money needed for the project, and, if applicable, how will the service be sustained once the grant money is expended?**

See attached

**8. Please describe how this project will enhance the delivery of state agency services or access to those services (you may attach a separate sheet if needed)**

See attached

**9. Please describe how this project will 1) Improve the efficiency of agency operations; 2) Facilitate collaboration among state agencies; 3) Facilitate collaboration between state agencies and other public institutions; Support public/private partnerships in the delivery of public services (you may respond to any or all of these criteria in your answer, attach additional pages if needed)**

See attached

**III. Technical Information**

**1. Describe the hardware, software, and communications needed for this project and explain why these choices were made.**

See attached

**2. Address any technical issues with the proposed technology including:**

- **Conformity with generally accepted industry standards. Projects which interface with other state systems (such as distance learning systems) should also address NITC technical standards and guidelines.**
- **Compatibility with existing institutional and/or statewide infrastructure.**
- **Reliability, security and scalability (future needs for growth or adaptation).**

See attached

**3. Describe how technical support will be provided.**

On-going technical support will be provided by aijalon, inc., the Nebraska State Treasurer's office, and IT professionals from First National Technology Solutions.

**IV. CONTACT INFORMATION, SIGNATURE**

Contact person for any questions regarding this application Perry A. Pirsch  
phone # 402-471-8923 E-mail PPirsch@treasurer.org

Signed this 28 day of September, 2007

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Agency Director

**Please Return to:**

**State Records Board  
440 So. 8th, Suite 210  
Lincoln, NE 68508  
(402) 471-2745**

# ATTACHMENT

## II. Grant Detail

### 1. Please describe the project in detail

In an attempt to demystify the confusing and, often times, complicated maze of government disbursements, State Treasurer Shane Osborn is creating NebraskaSpending.com: a public, searchable website that will delineate every aspect of state government spending.

Currently, the State of Nebraska does offer government spending information in the form of the Comprehensive Annual Financial Report (CAFR). The CAFR, however, is well over one hundred pages long, littered with complicated spreadsheets and ledgers, and satiated with a fiscal nomenclature that we believe is only understandable by a select assembly of the most learned financial authorities.

But even the CAFR has limitations.

If someone wanted to see the number of claimed expenses by each of the five Constitutional offices, or the amount of money the Department of Education spent on office supplies for any given month, they would have to go to the Accounting Division of the Department of Administrative Services and leaf through the Grant Project Summary which, for the month of August 2007, contains exactly 8,698 pages.

Again, the information is there but it is scattered across various agencies and departments and the overwhelming concentration of raw data prohibits any reasonable person from accessing it in any sort of meaningful way.

State agency websites, for better or worse, have been constructed by bureaucrats for bureaucrats with little consideration given towards things like ease of navigation, simplicity of terms, or uncomplicated graphs and tables.

NebraskaSpending.com will change that. We have retained aijalon, inc., a Lincoln-based web design and marketing company, to not only ensure that NebraskaSpending.com is both user friendly and visually appealing but to help us develop a market share during the initial roll-out.

By incorporating easy-to-read pie charts and bar graphs, NebraskaSpending.com will act as a central clearinghouse allowing users to access a wealth of government spending information like state expenditures, revenues, budgets, and even the average local property tax. There will also be a "Google" type search engine where users can review payment information for goods and services by category, vendor, or by contract.

While we anticipate our user-universe to include state, county, and municipal elected officials as well as their staff, NebraskaSpending.com is being constructed with the average citizen in mind. Site navigation will be straightforward and simple;

terminology will be very basic; and above all, Nebraskans will have a clear and distinct picture of how their tax dollars are being spent by the state government through various illustrations, such as pie charts, graphs, and tables.

The State Treasurer is uniquely suited to operate this type of website. First, the State Treasurer has been charged by the Nebraska Constitution and Statute to receipt and disburse state funds and to 'keep a just, true, and comprehensive account of all money received and disbursed.'

Second, unlike the Governor, who serves as Chief of the Executive Branch, or the Legislature, who provides the agency oversight, the State Treasurer is a neutral, unbiased custodian of state funds.

Further, the main objective of NebraskaSpending.com is to provide accurate information with cited sources, not editorialize or make policy judgments. The State Treasurer does not have a standing position or agenda as it relates to government spending habits. Our only concern is to allow average citizens the opportunity to scrutinize this information and form their own conclusions.

NebraskaSpending.com is set to go live on January 9, 2008 in order to facilitate the next Legislative session. At this point, NebraskaSpending.com will contain two interactive pie charts, one for major government expenditures and the other for government revenues. Each section of the pie chart will represent a different category in which the user will be able to click and "drill down" for more information such as how much money was devoted to that department and its total overall percentage of the budget.

**2. Please describe whom the beneficiary or recipient of this service will be and projected activity for access or use of the proposed service.**

Beneficiaries of NebraskaSpending.com include: state, federal, and municipal elected officials and members of their staff; students; teachers; general public; and any other demographic concerned with state spending habits and practices. Projected activity is estimated to begin with 1,000 internet "hits" for the initial month and increasing each month thereafter, peaking during each Legislative session.

**4. Agency contribution to project (labor, equipment etc.)**

In addition to providing general web maintenance and timely updates of spending figures, the Treasurer's office will: provide conceptual ideas for the visual elements of the site; provide images for the conceptual design if necessary; provide Database Extracts from the NIS system to be used with the site database; provide direction on what and how users search the database information; provide assistance with the final testing prior to site launch; attend GRAVEL instruction on updating site information.

**7. Why is the grant money needed for the project, and, if applicable, how will the service be sustained once the grant money is expended?**

Since NebraskaSpending.com was conceived to be a resource for Nebraska taxpayers, Treasurer Osborn believes every effort must be made to construct it without the use of public funds.

In addition to seeking a public grant, Treasurer Osborn will, if necessary, seek grants from non-partisan, private sector groups, organizations, and individuals who believe the general public has a right to see how the state is spending their tax dollars; however, the overwhelming expense is in the initial coding.

Yearly maintenance expenses are estimated at about \$1,100, within the Treasurer's budget, and the Treasurer's staff will be trained to make updates without need of another full-time or part-time staff member.

**8. Please describe how this project will enhance the delivery of state agency services or access to those services.**

As is stated in Section 84-1201 of the Nebraska Statutes that deal with the creation of the Records Management Act: (3) *The increasing availability and use of computers is creating a growing demand for electronic access to public records, and agencies should use new technology to enhance public access to public records.*

The NebraskaSpending.com project falls squarely within the boundaries of this statute because it is utilizing internet technology to provide the public with simple and immediate access to state spending records.

While the information is currently available through a myriad of sources, it is scattered across various agencies and departments and the overwhelming concentration of raw data prohibits a reasonable person from accessing it in any sort of meaningful way. This confusion and lack of immediate access to state spending information places an undue burden on agency staff members who are eventually contacted and expected to locate the necessary data.

By providing a central clearinghouse of state spending information that is easily accessed through the use of the internet, NebraskaSpending.com will prevent unnecessary communication between state agencies and the general public. As a result, agency employees can direct all spending related questions to the website and thus providing themselves with more disposable time to execute the services as outlined by their respective divisions.

**9. Please describe how this project will 1) Improve the efficiency of agency operations; 2) Facilitate collaboration among state agencies; 3) Facilitate collaboration between state agencies and other public institutions; Support public/private partnerships in the delivery of public services.**

In 1997, LB590 expanded the duties of the State Records Board to include oversight and management of electronic access to state government information, including information provided over the internet. While this mission statement properly reflects the very spirit of NebraskaSpending.com, it also serves as the foundation for a strong, robust and long-lasting collaborative effort between state agencies and the users of this website.

NebraskaSpending.com will take pre-existing financial information presently scattered throughout numerous agency sources and consolidate it into a simple and easy-to-read website. This effort will provide a consistent, accurate, and neutral resource that will immediately benefit members from every branch of our state government.

For example, this project will contain information from the Comprehensive Annual Financial Report (CAFR) available from the office of the Nebraska State Auditor; budgets available through the Department of Administrative Services (DAS); tax revenue available through the Department of Revenue; as well as the budgets of numerous state agencies available through the Legislative Fiscal Office.

Additionally, we believe NebraskaSpending.com will set the standard for how public/private partnerships are viewed in the future. Already, Treasurer Osborn has been working with individuals, organizations, and think-tanks from the private sector who share the belief that Nebraskans have a right to see how the state is spending their tax dollars and include them in the construction process. These partnerships will prove invaluable as the project moves forward and provide new perspectives on how government and private sector entities can come together for the benefit of the citizenry.

### **III. Technical Information**

#### **1. Describe the hardware, software, and communications needed for this project and explain why these choices were made.**

##### **Hardware:**

Linux Distribution: CentOS Release 5  
Installation Type: Shared Host  
Storage: 3GB disk space (via RAID mirrored drives)  
CPU: Dual 2.4 GHz Xeon processors

##### **Software:**

Apache: 2.2.4  
APC 3.0.14  
ADODB 4.95a  
MySQL: 5.0.41  
OpenSSL 0.9.8e  
PEAR 1.6.1  
PHP: 5.2.3  
Smarty 2.6.18  
VIM 7.1

SSH  
Flash 9.0

Several of the components listed above are supporting software for the system's operating system. The intended purpose of using flash will be to assist users in interpreting the data of State spending activities through a duplicated written and visual means.

**Communications:**

The two parties, Nebraska State Treasurer and aijalon inc. will work closely together to create a web site that quickly and easily outlines state spending for the public user. This will require considerable communication efforts on both parties. This will be done through the processes of meetings, email, and telephone. Once deployed the main mode for communication to the public will be the web site itself, however a full scale promotion of the web site to get the public involved will be part of the strategy provided by aijalon in cooperation with the Nebraska State Treasurer.

**2. Address any technical issues with the proposed technology including:**

- **Conformity with generally accepted industry standards. Projects which interface with other state systems (such as distance learning systems) should also address NITC technical standards and guidelines.**

The system will not be interfacing directly with other state systems during phase 1 of the project. All information will be provided independently to the system which will rely upon its own database. The web site will be tested in all state-supported browsers (Internet Explorer 6.0+, Netscape 7.2+, Firefox 1.5+, Opera 9.0+) for consistency in the display and usability features of the site. The site will also meet ADA section 508 compliance standards.

- **Compatibility with existing institutional and/or statewide infrastructure.**

The system (which will be independent of existing state infrastructure) will conform to a stricter, more secure set of guidelines established by both aijalon and Treasurer's staff.

- **Reliability, security and scalability (future needs for growth or adaptation).**

This system will be hosted through the First National Technology Solution data center located in Omaha, NE. The center currently meets SAS70 requirements for the on site security provided. The center is staffed 24X7X365 to ensure reliability and stability is provided for the system support. The system will be build with scalability in mind to meet future needs of the Treasurer's desire to expand the site. This will be accomplished within the planning phase of the site development.