

SMARTER STATE CASE STUDIES

OFFICE OF MANAGEMENT AND BUDGET: MAX.GOV

The governmentwide collaboration site whose robust authentication system enables working and sharing knowledge across agency boundaries



COLLABORATION

February 10, 2016

Thank you to Larry Nagl, Katie Santoro, Mark Dronfield, and Andrew Schoenbach for their assistance.



SMART CITIZENS SMARTER STATE



This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International License

BASIC INFORMATION

BASICS

Owner

Office of Budget and Management

Project Owner

Phil Wenger

Office of Budget and Management

maxsupport@omb.eop.gov

(202) 395-6860

Audience

Federal employees and staff and federal contractors.

Problem that MAX Tried to Solve

Absence of a secure space for collaboration among and between federal agencies.

Project Summary

MAX provides a broad palette of tools for finding and working with potential collaborators.

Platform

MAX is a web service maintained by OMB and the Budget Formulation and Execution Line of Business.

Design Basics

MAX authenticates users and gives them access to its web services, which include a number of tools for working together.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

What's new?

More federal employees are collaborating on projects, saving time and money.

Incentives for Participation

More federal employees are collaborating on projects, saving time and money.

Challenges

The need for high levels of information security and robust authentication capabilities on MAX leads to both its distinguishing functionalities and the greatest ongoing challenges.

Anticipated impact/Metrics

MAX has had a wide range of impacts from demonstrably increasing the collaborative capacity of civil servants across agencies to decreasing the time and resources required to achieve certain objectives – like conducted official budget inquiries.

Why is this project interesting?

MAX brings an entirely new way of working to the federal government. Analytics, report generation, and other services are brought to the user's fingertips, and everything can be done in collaboration with other staff. MAX is the only truly interagency and intergovernmental secure collaboration platform.





Collaboration across agency boundaries has traditionally been cumbersome and slow in the federal government. There is no single place to which every employee has common access. With commercial platforms like Google Docs unavailable to many federal employees at their desktops for security reasons, cross-departmental collaboration has been difficult.

Collaboration across agency boundaries has traditionally been cumbersome and slow in the federal government. There is no single place to which every employee has common access. With commercial platforms like Google Docs unavailable to many federal employees at their desktops for security reasons, cross-departmental collaboration has been difficult.

WHY MAX: OBJECTIVES

MAX.gov began modestly in 2007 to solve the problem of needing to pass budget information securely back and forth between OMB and agencies and to facilitate document collaboration during the budgeting process. Because it uses strong, two-factor authentication relying on the Common Access Card (CAC)¹ and Personal Identity Verification (PIV)² cards issued to every federal employee, MAX has evolved into the de facto government-wide collaboration platform. It is the one place that is both open to every fed (and authorized contractors) and closed to everyone else. At the same time, MAX's permissions system enables the creation of secure "enclaves" where designated outsiders can be invited without access to the rest of the platform. Hence it is a flexible, practical way to collaborate and share securely.

HOW IT WORKS

The Office of Management and Budget (OMB) and the Budget Formulation and Execution Line of Business (BFELoB) created the MAX Federal Community, MAX.gov's collaboration and knowledge management platform, on a commercial web platform called Confluence, offered by Atlassian. The goal was to create an environment where government employees could collaborate securely across agency boundaries. The OMB in-house team began to further develop and customize the platform on its own in response to user needs. Now MAX.gov has expanded its services to include tools that help employees collect and analyze data, write reports, share presentations, and carry out surveys.

1 <http://www.cac.mil/common-access-card/>

2 <http://csrc.nist.gov/groups/SNS/piv/>



Some of the major components include:

- **Government-wide collaboration sites.** These provide forums for people in different agencies who have a common interest, such as financial management or human capital, to share guidance, learn about training opportunities and upcoming events, and collaborate on best practices. One of the site's goals, for example, is to create a community around federal grants management.
- **Enclaves.** These are secure spaces where government users can invite people from outside government to use MAX collaboration tools.
- **Data collection.** MAX Collect is a data collection and report assembly tool that serves as a secure repository for collecting, hosting and accessing data across silos.
- **Analytics.** These include not only familiar charts and report generation, but GIS mapping.³ Besides common output formats such as spreadsheets and PDFs, output can be uploaded to MAX Federal Community dashboards.
- **Document editing.** MAX features a diversity of collaborative functionalities similar to Microsoft's SharePoint.
- **Project management tools.** The tasks required to complete a project, and the stages through which the project passes, can be tracked using workflows.
- **Surveys.** More than 1,000 surveys have been conducted using MAX Survey.
- **Shared desktop.** A shared desktop feature can allow virtual meetings and virtual collaboration on documents.
- **Search.** Members can look for potential collaborators, or search documents on the site. In both cases, searching is aided by rich filters such as keyword, title, and date ranges. MAX can also index and provide faceted search results for data prioritized by users.
- **Training.** Information on the budget process, and the skills that staff need to complete it, are offered through online videos, webinars, conferences, and panels. The BFELOB's Human Capital workgroup developed online courses in a number of topic areas, like budget execution and appropriations law. As of August 2016, these training videos have been viewed by over 7,000 participants.⁴
- **Authentication.** MAX authentication as a service provides provisioning services and user account management for agency systems and can include two factor authentication.

³ <http://www.wired.com/2015/08/open-source-map-tracks-governments-hard-work/>

⁴ <http://www.govexec.com/excellence/promising-practices/2015/08/budgeteers-join-forces-online-get-more-bang-buck/119651/>



MAX FEDERAL COMMUNITY

Home

PERMISSIONS OPEN EXECUTIVE BRANCH

MAX Federal Community Home (12)

Edited By Justin Rordan (OHB.Ctr) on Sep 16, 2013 at 09:38 AM

Search The MAX Community All

Click on the Agency, Government-Wide Community, or Cross-Agency Collaboration you are interested in.

Agency Communities

- Access Board
- Army Corps of Engineers
- Broadcasting Board of Governors
- Commission on Civil Rights
- Consumer Financial Protection Bureau
- Consumer Products Safety Commission
- Corporation for National & Community Service
- Council on Environmental Quality
- Department of Agriculture
- Department of Commerce
- Department of Defense
- Department of Education
- Department of Energy
- Department of Health and Human Services
- Department of Homeland Security
- Department of Housing & Urban Development
- Department of the Interior
- Department of Justice
- Department of Labor
- Department of State
- Department of Transportation
- Department of the Treasury
- Department of Veterans Affairs

Government-Wide Communities

- Acquisition
- Budget
- E-Government
- Financial Management
- Grants
- Homeland Security
- Human Capital
- IT Infrastructure
- Management
- Open Government
- Performance
- Planning
- Recovery Act
- Small Agencies
- Sustainability
- Web and New Media

Cross-Community Topics

Cross-Agency Collaborations

- Federal Credit Policy Council (FCPC) Home
- Federal Records Officers Network (FRON)
- Hurricane Sandy Rebuilding Task Force
- Information Collection Request, Review and Approval System (ICRAS)
- Infrastructure Projects - Permitting and Review
- Leading EDGE
- Partnership for Sustainable Communities
- Service First - Working Together...
- SFEB HR-Training Committee
- Trade Promotion Coordinating Committee (TPCC)
- Uncle Sam's List

About the MAX Federal Community

MAX Homepage

MAX now has over 170,000 members, including federal employees, staff at federal contractors, and trusted partners. The platform is increasingly being used as a government-wide directory.

Additionally, the BFELOB convenes events three times a year that provide opportunities for MAX users to showcase how they have been using the tools to optimize their business processes, save money, and add value. These forums frequently evolve into brainstorming and learning sessions on how attendees without IT backgrounds can leverage MAX's technology to better do their jobs. These Expos also provided a much-needed source of input to help the design team prioritize new features.

Each agency has an intra-agency space and an interdepartmental space on MAX. Thus, projects can start within the agency, which can then invite outsiders, including state and local government, non-profit, or commercial partners to help when desired. Use of MAX has grown mostly through word-of-mouth. It is a rare example of a government effort driven by people on the ground rather than by executives. Although collaboration within the budget community was the first application for the site, the same tools have proven useful for a wide range of needs. HHS, the Defense Department, NASA, HUD, the Treasury, and 30 Indian tribes are just a few of the organizations who have completed projects using MAX.



Many agencies have adopted the healthy “open source attitude” of making their own changes and feeding them back to the original OMB site, to expand the toolbox of capabilities available to MAX users. There is no need to go through a time-consuming procurement process. The site has won an ACT-IAC’s Excellence.gov award, was a Government Computer News Honorable Mention, an Intergovernmental Solutions Award Finalist, and a ComputerWorld’s Honors Program Lauriet. Individuals working on MAX have received an Information Systems Security Certification Consortium award,⁵ and have been cited in four Federal Computer Week Fed 100 and Rising Stars programs.⁶⁷

Many government activities could be improved or made more efficient through cross-agency collaboration, but traditional communication tools are slow and hard to use. MAX encourages staff to find helpers and produce documents and programs collaboratively, by providing a large set of tools for analytics, document editing, participation in forums, and other activities.

LESSONS LEARNED

MAX has vastly expanded collaboration across agency lines and shown what is possible.

- *Governments need tools for collaboration across agency boundaries.* Budgeting is only one example of the widespread activities that involve multiple government institutions. Another recent example is an initiative to improve health care on Indian reservations,⁸ tying together several agencies. Many activities need to go beyond the capabilities of telephones and email, and require better security.
- *In-house development (by employees or contractors)* can help to ensure that platforms respond to internal government user needs better than a commercial platform.
- *Collaboration can save time.* One agency’s Congressional Inquiry response time went from six months to 25 days when MAX was adopted.

5 <https://fcw.com/blogs/fcw-insider/2015/05/isc-awards.aspx>

6 <https://fcw.com/articles/2015/11/23/2015-rising-star-alex-lin.aspx>

7 <https://www.eiseverywhere.com/ehome/49069/83917/?&>

8 <http://abcnews.go.com/US/wireStory/ap-newsbreak-feds-outline-reforms-reservation-hospitals-36689666>



ABOUT THE GOVLAB

The GovLab’s mission is to improve people’s lives by changing how we govern. Our goal is to strengthen the ability of institutions – including but not limited to governments – and people to work more openly, collaboratively, effectively and legitimately to make better decisions and solve public problems. For more information, please visit: www.thegovlab.org.

ABOUT SMARTER STATE

New tools—what GovLab calls technologies of expertise— are making it possible to match the supply of citizen expertise to the demand for it in government. Smarter State is a GovLab initiative to design and test how public decision-making could improve if institutions knew how to use the technologies of expertise to tap the wisdom of citizens’ and civil servants.