



# FTA Awards Nomination/Entry Form

## Person who led this effort or project

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## About your program, idea, or project

**Name your program, idea, or project:** Managing a massive influx of city partners into Washington State's Business Licensing Service

**What is the problem that you wanted to solve?** In 2017, legislation required Washington's 239 cities and towns that issue a general business license to join the state's Business Licensing Service (BLS) or another system by Dec. 31, 2022. With just 64 partner cities/towns at the time, this increase represented a massive influx that the current process could not handle. Swift action was needed to meet the deadline. Instead of onboarding an average of four cities a year, Revenue was now expected to onboard nearly six times that number!

Washington's Business Licensing Service is a "one-stop-shop," a single point where business owners can register for and renew their business licenses and receive state and local endorsements. It is one of the few one-stop licensing services in the United States. The accelerated timeline required changes – to the process, system, and number of staff. Many cities weren't aware of the benefits BLS could bring and were ill-prepared for this change.

With a deadline of Dec. 2022 for all cities to become partners in BLS, the clock was ticking.

**Who was involved in addressing the problem?** Revenue's Executive Team and BLS leadership knew they'd have to put their full support behind this effort. Due to the tight timeline, they leveraged existing expertise and internal resources. Revenue's Lean Transformation Office was enlisted and a project team was formed with subject matter experts from BLS, the existing Partnership Services Team that manages these relationships, and representatives from other impacted divisions.

**How did they go about finding a solution?** The team used Lean techniques to thoroughly analyze the

current process for onboarding. They identified roadblocks, opportunities for streamlining, and changes they could make to speed up the process without sacrificing quality or important relationships. The team identified four primary areas for improvement:

- Geography

The team placed the cities in geographical areas so they could work on all of the components of onboarding in one geographical area at a time. This made educating the cities and working on those onboarding components easier, as well as improving efficiency for the businesses that may need licenses from nearby cities.

- Timeline

The current onboarding process wasn't efficient or coordinated enough to meet the demands of the legislation. With that in mind, the team developed a new timeline that laid out a process with clearly identified checkpoints and expectations for both BLS and the customer. Adding more structure and precision to the timeline allowed them to achieve accelerated onboarding results.

- Roles and responsibilities

As part of the process analysis, they redefined roles and responsibilities and created teams that specialized in each functional area: city onboarding, managing ongoing relations with current partners, and implementing future legislation. This separation of duties led to big productivity gains.

- Staffing

After streamlining the process, it became clear that the lofty goal couldn't be achieved with the current staff of eight. The streamlined process identified eight additional staff were necessary to successfully implement the new partnership legislation. A request was made and funded by the 2018 Legislature and the team hired and trained those staff as quickly as possible.

**Describe the outcome. What is the new idea, approach, program, or activity?**

By addressing the identified areas, the team was able to meet the deadline using the new streamlined approach and detailed project plan. Starting up to 12 months before a new partner goes live and running through the first 30 days, the plan is a repeatable roadmap that allows for iterative improvements based on partner feedback. Everything from preplanning to go live is detailed in the plan, which sets clear expectations for both sides. The specific checkpoint dates also allow the team to benchmark progress and adjust if a partnership is falling behind.

Revenue implemented the accelerated onboarding schedule in 2019, and quickly began making strides with its improved, efficient process.

**What has changed since this was implemented? How have your operations improved? Include any data, analytics or metrics that would show the value of your program. Don't forget management advantages such as improved morale.**

These process changes have made it possible to meet the new, aggressive schedule for onboarding cities. As of March 2021, 160 cities are partnered with BLS; this represents an increase of 150% from 2017. Now business owners in those cities have one-stop access to register and

renew up to 400 state and city license endorsements.

For city partners, the process improvements and having a designated point of contact have resulted in more seamless communication with fewer questions and delays. The agency was able to meet its performance measure of responding to partner change requests - approving or denying requests in 30 days/100% of the time. All of this has improved relationships between Revenue and the cities.

Cities have praised the new partnership, and the onboarding process.

"The City of Redmond, WA, is excited to be partnering with the Department of Revenue Business Licensing Service to streamline and ease the application and/or renewal process for our business community," said Ryan Spencer, Business Operations Administrator for the City of Redmond.

"Providing a one-stop shop is something that the city has moved toward for all our customer interactions with the launch of a centralized Customer Service Center in 2018. We recognize the benefits of this approach and know that our community will greatly appreciate this new and much more convenient process."

"Our revenues increased 15% in the first year (of partnership)," said Carrie Lewellen, business manager for the City of Vancouver. "With BLS, we're able to identify our businesses and their employees more easily."

Staff also appreciate the changes that have taken place with the new process, the growth of the team, and the clearly defined roles and responsibilities.

"I'm happy to say with the restructure, the amount of stress has gone down immensely – 'go-live' days, especially. Although there's a lot to do, having an experienced team to cover the workload is such an awesome thing." – Data Consultant with the Partnership Services Maintenance Team.

"Growing to a team of 16 was the best thing that happened to Partnership Services and our partners. We have the time and ability to focus on our partners throughout all stages of partnership. Each team within Partnership Services plays a big role in making this successful." – Management Analyst and Onboarding Team Supervisor in Partnership Services.

"I was impressed with leadership's commitment to continual improvement well after the larger team formed. We all had a voice and were given the opportunity to share what we each felt was working well and what we as a team could improve on." – Management Analyst with the Onboarding Team of Partnership Services

**Is there any component of your program that makes it workable only in your state or city?**

Everybody ought to be doing this.

**Is this an in-house project, or did you partner with an outside vendor or service-provider?**

100% in-house

**What comes next – will you be adding to your program, rolling it out more widely, trying additional approaches?**

While we celebrate the success of our Business Licensing Service, we continue to evaluate the needs of staff and partners to ensure all partnerships continue to be successful. We work closely with our state and city partners to better understand their specific needs, and continually seek ways to improve and adjust the process. We are committed to the PDCA approach to iterative process improvement – Plan, Do, Check, and Adjust.

## **Additional Optional Materials**

**Website/Documentation URL (Must be publicly accessible)** [dor.wa.gov](http://dor.wa.gov)