REI Systems helped the U.S. Office of Management and Budget promote open government and accountability through a single searchable website to track all Federal spending.

Client Overview

The Office of Management and Budget (OMB) oversees budget development and management of government-wide topics including IT, Procurement, Financial Management and Performance. In order to assist the President to implement his vision and priorities across the Executive Branch, in 2009, OMB engaged REI Systems (REI) to support a series of initiatives designed to produce more openness, accountability, and transparency in government operations.

Challenge

In 2006 the Federal Funding Accountability and Transparency Act (FAFTA) was passed to strengthen the accountability for the use of tax payers’ money. Among the requirements of the Act was the establishment of a single searchable website that contained information across the Federal Government on all spending awards such as grants, loans and contracts. The website would become USASpending.gov, and in order to provide true transparency it needed to provide critical information on the details of the awards and awardees.

To fulfill these obligations, OMB engaged REI to design, implement and continuously upgrade a site that would describe the $24 trillion in spending across the Federal Government. As the site grew, so too did the challenges and requirements, and at each step, REI provided the necessary solutions.

Solution

REI met OMB’s challenges and continues to improve upon them to this day. REI leveraged web capabilities based on their proven expertise and earlier successes with developing Data.gov. To meet the tight six week deadline of the initial implementation of USASpending.gov, REI provided a full range of around the clock services to the customer to meet their timeframe.

WHAT THEY’RE SAYING ABOUT REI

“We included an ambitious time frame (on USASpending.gov); we knew it would be difficult. I congratulate all of those who rose to the occasion and met this challenge.”

– (Former) Rep. Tom Davis (R-Va)
One of the key requirements that REI identified to help save valuable time were automated data refresh routines to extract, transform and load agency procurement data. Additionally, to ensure the security of the information, online data submission and validation tools were needed to provide instant data quality feedback to help agencies correct submissions in real time.

As President Obama took office, a renewed emphasis on financial accountability and transparency stimulated significant innovations to the web site. Once again, OMB turned to REI to make the improvements using the Web 2.0 technologies that made their Data.gov project successful.

REI leveraged an open source platform to re-design the site’s user interface and manage content to provide context to the data displays, tabulations, and visualizations. Deciding to adopt a citizen-centric approach, the navigation was simplified and more options were added to visualize and aggregate the data through multi-dimensional charts and maps. Most recently REI integrated sub-award data onto the site, adding a new tier of data for a more complete spending picture.

After development, this application was deployed to the NASA Nebula (public) Cloud to take advantage of the benefits of a virtual data center environment. Once deployed, and due to the fact that the site was processing enormous amounts of data (adding over 1 million rows per month), REI executed a hosting strategy that combined the cloud environment with actual “bare metal” servers to make sure transaction speeds met user demands.

**Results**

Within a few months of deployment REI reached OMB’s 100% data completion goal. The new automatic data refresh routines gave the 40 agencies pushing data to the site the ability to report transparency within the mandated thirty days.

The initial USASpending.gov website debuted two weeks ahead of schedule and the public widely heralded it as the right step toward increased transparency and openness within the Federal Government. For his tight turnaround and excellent execution of the project, REI Co-Founder and CTO Shyam Salona was recognized with a Fed 100 Award in both 2008 and 2010 for his leadership in helping President Obama’s transparency initiatives become a reality.

**RESULTS AT A GLANCE**

- Accounts for $24 trillion in spending for 44 federal agencies from FY 2000 onwards
- Processes over 1 million rows of data per month
- Receives data from over 40 Federal agencies
- Resulted in presentation of two Fed 100 Awards to REI CTO, Shyam Salona