OIT ACCESS

STATE OF ALABAMA
OFFICE OF INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY
STREAMLINING IT IN ALABAMA STATE GOVERNMENT

IN THIS ISSUE

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WELCOME to *OIT Access*,

the Office of Information Technology's quarterly newsletter. This publication is intended to be a resource for the numerous Alabama state agencies that rely on OIT and its services to help carry out their important missions and more effectively serve the citizens of our great state.

In addition to sharing the latest OIT news and announcements, each issue will help to keep readers informed about the wide range of information technology (IT) products and services available to agencies through OIT's Service Catalog. *OIT Access* also aims to be a platform for sharing news about several of the exciting IT projects, initiatives, and programs taking place at agencies across Alabama state government.

OIT is firmly committed to meeting the continuously evolving IT demands of the agencies we serve. If we are successful in this effort, it is the people of Alabama who are the true beneficiaries. OIT thanks you for your partnership in this vital work and we hope you enjoy this issue of *OIT Access*!

Our Mission & Vision

MISSION

Through communication and collaboration, OIT aims to empower stakeholders with innovative services and technologies that reliably deliver highly available, secure, efficient, and cost-effective services for agencies, legislators, and citizens across all levels of Alabama state government.

VISION

OIT aspires to provide solutions and services that are standardized, implemented in a timely and high-quality manner, and designed to meet the operational needs of each agency, legislator, and citizen who depends on their services.

OIT Leadership

DANIEL URQUHART
Secretary
State Chief Information Officer

WILLIE FIELDS
Deputy Secretary

CHADWICK SMITH
Chief Information Security Officer

MARK CRAYMER
Executive Director
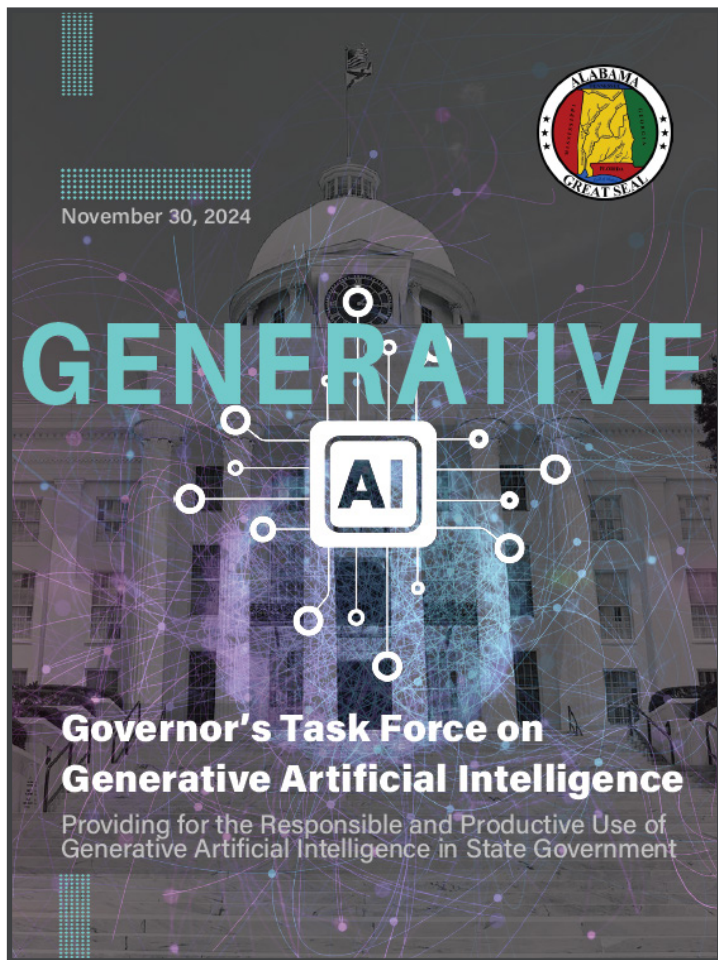Shared Services

ROGER BOWMAN
Executive Director
Support Services

BROOKE COVINGTON
Executive Director
Finance and Procurement

KEITH COUSINS
Executive Director
Business Execution

November 30, 2024

GENERATIVE
AI

Governor's Task Force on Generative Artificial Intelligence
Providing for the Responsible and Productive Use of Generative Artificial Intelligence in State Government

GENAI TASK FORCE

Update: Task Force Submits GenAI Final Report

The Generative Artificial Intelligence (GenAI) Task Force has officially concluded its work by submitting a Final Report to Governor Kay Ivey ahead of the November 30, 2024, deadline laid out in Executive Order (EO) 738 – Providing for the Responsible and Productive Use of Generative AI in State Government. Chaired by Daniel Urquhart, Secretary of Information Technology and Alabama's Chief Information Officer, the Task Force had the responsibility of understanding the current uses of GenAI, encouraging the responsible and effective use of GenAI, and recommending policies and procedures related to the use of GenAI in Alabama executive-branch agencies.

Several key focus areas identified in EO 738 led to the development of four Working Groups:

- Responsible and Ethical Use of GenAI
- Data Management and Ownership
- Workforce Education and Training
- Policies and Governance

The collective efforts of the GenAI Task Force and its Working Groups have been impactful. Their meetings led to the development of ten overarching recommendations for GenAI utilization across the State of Alabama's executive-branch agencies, which they included in the Task Force's Final Report to the Governor.

The Final Report's purpose is to help demystify GenAI for state entities, thoughtfully considering ways its power can be employed to enhance State functions and services to Alabama citizens and providing actionable recommendations for its potential applications and use by agencies.

Topics addressed in the GenAI Task Force Final Report include but are not limited to:

- Overview of Artificial Intelligence and How GenAI is Different
- Individual and Shared Risks of GenAI
- Defining Data Ownership, Classification, and Readiness
- Educating State Government Employees on How to Safely and Productively Use GenAI
- GenAI Procurement and Development Guidelines
- Executive-Branch Gen AI Inventory Report
- Task Force Recommendations
- And more!

Since its formation in February of 2024, the GenAI Task Force has dedicated its efforts to deeply exploring current GenAI uses, considering ways to nurture the responsible procurement and development of GenAI applications, and highlighting the essential need for actionable policies to help guide the productive and efficient deployment of this groundbreaking technology within state government.

The GenAI Task Force expresses its profound gratitude to Governor Ivey for her visionary leadership and steadfast commitment to upholding Alabama's legacy as a pioneer in technological innovation. It is the sincere hope of the Task Force that the Final Report will help to mobilize Alabama state government to achieve even greater technical advancements in the years ahead.

OIT Secretary Daniel Urquhart, Chair of the GenAI Task Force, welcomes everyone in attendance to the final GenAI Task Force meeting on October 31, 2024.

MULTI-AGENCY

Election Tabletop Exercise

In an effort to ensure the safety of critical infrastructure and State government systems, the Office of Information Technology (OIT) has begun the significant initiative of restructuring OIT's Incident Response Plan (IRP).

The IRP's purpose is to guide agency leadership in detecting, responding to, and recovering from cybersecurity incidents to minimize harm to operations, data, and reputation in the event of a threat or attack. In line with this important venture, OIT hosted an Election Tabletop Exercise (TTX) on October 2, 2024, at the Alabama Army National Guard Headquarters in Montgomery, Alabama.

The TTX was a mock exercise designed to help prepare essential personnel on how to effectively respond should a cybersecurity incident occur on or around election day. Participants included representatives from the following state agencies:

- Alabama Secretary of State's Office
- Alabama National Guard
- Alabama Law Enforcement Agency
- Alabama Emergency Management Agency
- Alabama Administrative Office of Courts
- Alabama Office of Information Technology

The Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA), and partners from private industry also participated.

The event focused on a series of hypothetical election night disruptions that could also be a cybersecurity incident. The various agencies discussed protocol and other measures that would be followed should such an incident arise. Participants also took part in a debrief session, a crucial part of the TTX, emphasizing the positive aspects of the current plan while exploring possible mitigations to prevent incidents and further improve the response.

OIT Deputy Secretary Willie Fields concluded the exercise by stating, "This is the first of many Tabletop Exercises to come. Our Incident Response Plan will be refined as we document crucial processes, partnerships, and protections to put in place to help safeguard our great state and nation."

Photos used with permission from the Alabama National Guard.

OIT WELCOMES STATE CISO

Introducing Chad Smith as the New State CISO

Left to right: Chad Smith, Frank Yarnell, and Jesse Craver of the OIT Information Security team

OIT is excited to introduce Chad Smith as the new State Chief Information Security Officer (CISO). With a rich background in various roles and industries, Chad brings a wealth of knowledge, creativity, and leadership to OIT and the numerous state agencies we serve.

Background

Chad has an impressive track record in the commercial world focused around cybersecurity, technology integrations, executive interactions, and strategy development and execution. His diverse experience will be particularly helpful with his relationships across the industry.

Before joining OIT, Chad worked for Cisco Systems, Colonial Bank, and ALFA Insurance. His leadership style is characterized by curiosity and problem solving. Chad has reported to numerous boards and interacted with many different industry verticals across the South.

Chad isn't just a leader in management and strategy; he's also technically adept. He has held numerous certifications in cybersecurity, data networking, and international privacy.

Life Outside the Public

Beyond his professional life, Chad is actively engaged in many community initiatives. A lifelong learner, he meticulously studies, conducts research, and teaches a class on ancient Biblical text. Chad is also involved in a wide range of non-profit organizations.

In his downtime, Chad and his wife enjoy spending quality time with their large family, which includes five children. They live on a developing farm where they have Katahdin hair sheep, honeybees, chickens, fruit trees, and a solar farm. You can often find Chad creating and building new things around his farm or riding on his tractor as he listens to various podcasts.

Welcome to the Team!

Chad's diverse professional experience and knowledge position him as a key asset to our State for cybersecurity, risk management, and privacy. At OIT, he will lead a team focused on information security, as well as governance, risk, and compliance matters, bringing along fresh perspectives and innovative ideas.

Chad has already begun to dive into his new role with energy, enthusiasm, and expertise. Feel free to stop by his office located on the second floor of the Folsom Administration Building to introduce yourself and share your own experiences or ideas with him.

We are excited about Chad's arrival and look forward to the contributions he will make to both OIT and the State of Alabama!

The top left photo is Chad with his wife, Kelli, visiting Alaska. The middle photo is their five children: Mary, Wyatt, Calvin, Foster, and Annie.

Chad shared the bottom left photo of the Grand Tetons in Wyoming stating, "I chose this mountain image because it inspires me to reflect on life itself—something so awe-inspiring, beautiful, and fraught with challenges, yet utterly worth embracing. This mountain is part of the Grand Tetons National Park we visited last summer."

IMPROVING IN THE STATE AND NATION

OIT Shows Progress Across the Board

Since 2013, the Office of Information Technology (OIT) has endeavored to meet the ever-growing information technology (IT) demands of the numerous Alabama agencies working to benefit the great citizens of our state.

OIT's vision of aspiring to provide solutions and services that are standardized, implemented in a timely and high-quality manner, and designed to meet the operational needs of its users is a daily venture that cannot be undervalued.

With its mission, vision, and guiding principles at the forefront of operations, OIT has made significant steps toward the goal of supporting the State as a trusted business partner in IT.

Business Vision Survey – State Agency Satisfaction Improvement

In an effort to improve its service delivery to Alabama state agencies and make strategic and informed decisions, OIT participates in an annual Business Vision Survey conducted by Info-Tech Research Group, an international IT service management company.

The survey, which focuses on the overall satisfaction with and value from IT services, is disseminated to various agencies each year to provide an honest and critical assessment of OIT's business practices and services.

OIT's satisfaction and approval rating has steadily improved in every category of the survey since 2021. Below are a few anonymous comments from key agency stakeholders in the 2024 Business Vision Survey:

> **Overall, I've seen improvement in OIT efforts to work collaboratively with agencies.**

> **I appreciate the continuing efforts of Secretary Urquhart and the staff he has assembled.**

> **OIT has always been responsive to me. They are professional, knowledgeable, and informative. It's a great group to work with!**

These and other comments collected from the survey exemplify OIT's commitment to function as a valued partner to state agencies in the critically important work they do.

However, improvement is a continuous and never-ending process. In the months and years ahead, OIT is focused on developing and meeting key performance indicator (KPI) goals around initiatives such as:

√ **Network Segmentation Advancements**

√ **Updating Policies**

√ **Maturing the Security Program**

√ **Improving Data Quality, Reports, and the Service Desk**

√ **And many more!**

As OIT strives to increase satisfaction in the additional areas of executing requests, communicating effectively, and creating more innovative opportunities, our ultimate goal is to effectively meet the IT demands of state agencies and empower them to better serve the citizens of Alabama.

Digital States Survey – Nationwide IT Improvement

Another integral piece to improving OIT and the State of Alabama's IT business and service practices is evaluating its enhancement of operations, cost savings, and innovation.

In 2024, OIT and other agency IT departments participated in the Digital States Survey, a biennial evaluation of the IT practices of all 50 states, published by the Center for Digital Government (CDG), the nation's only state and local government and education media and research company.

This self-auditing survey scores the responses and assigns a letter grade based on quantifiable data and deep analysis of state IT components such as but not limited to:

Aligned Leadership

Continuous Innovation

Cyber Risk Management

Data Governance and Use

Workforce Planning

The State of Alabama improved upon its previous score from 2022 and earned an overall a score of "B" for focusing on citizen-centric technologies, enhanced cybersecurity, and the responsible and ethical use of generative artificial intelligence (GenAI) in state executive-branch agencies.

Progressing in Technology | Enhancing Service Delivery

As OIT moves forward in 2025, it will continue to utilize innovative solutions and impactful strategies that enhance the work and services of State agencies with efficiency and excellence.

Effectively and transparently communicating with stakeholders will further advance its efforts of refining IT services and business practices for the benefit of Alabama citizens. To quote one final agency stakeholder from the 2024 Business Vision Survey:

"
I feel strongly that there has been a focused effort to improve upon the image of OIT. Leadership appears to not only have an interest in improving the overall technological landscape for the citizens of the State of Alabama but also exhibit a real desire to work closely with the agencies to assist them in being positioned to better serve their respective customers."

OIT is dedicated to fulfilling its mission to empower stakeholders with innovative services and technologies that reliably deliver highly available, secure, efficient, and cost-effective services for agencies, legislators, and citizens across all levels of Alabama state government.

OIT SERVICE SPOTLIGHT

Webex Suite Roundup Part II

As was shared in the last issue of *OIT Access*, the Office of Information Technology's (OIT) Voice Services team has begun hosting a quarterly series of Webex informational sessions. These sessions aim to highlight Webex's exciting new features along with tips and tricks that Alabama state agency users can take advantage of to enhance their experience with the technology.

The first session was held on August 21, 2024, and focused on Remember User Layout, AI Codec, and Highlight to Call, to name a few features. The second session was held on November 20, 2024, and spotlighted even more new tools:

Apple CarPlay: Contacts Support
Now you can follow Alabama law and be productive with Contact Support on Apple CarPlay that allows you to access recent calls and contacts, hands-free.
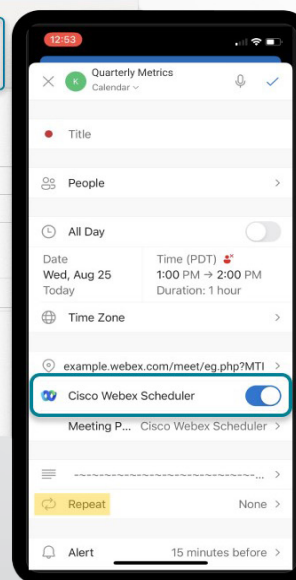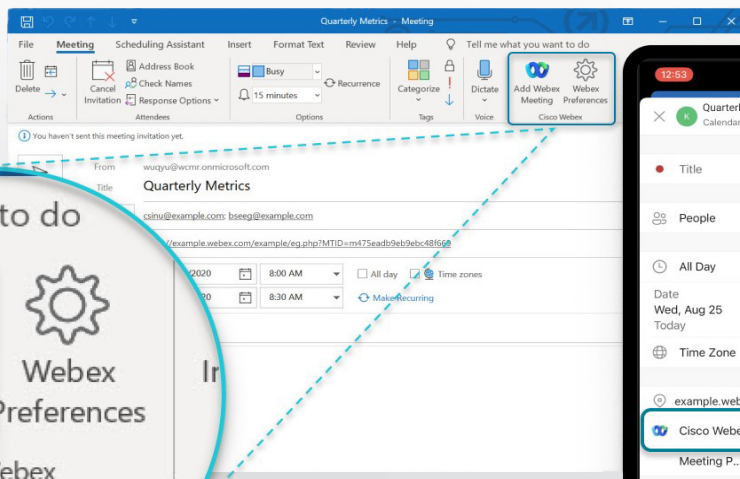
**Schedule Recurring Meetings on Mobile**
The capability you already enjoy of scheduling or editing upcoming recurring meetings is now also available on your mobile devices.

In-Meeting AI Assistant: Webex for Apple Vision Pro – This AI feature gives you the ability to catch up on everything you missed in a meeting by viewing a summary of the last 15 minutes or of the entire meeting. You can even ask questions (only visible to you) about action items or any mention of your name.

Slido Polling: New Host Mode
This new interface is designed for improved visibility and easier navigation, enabling you to create and manage polls in seconds.
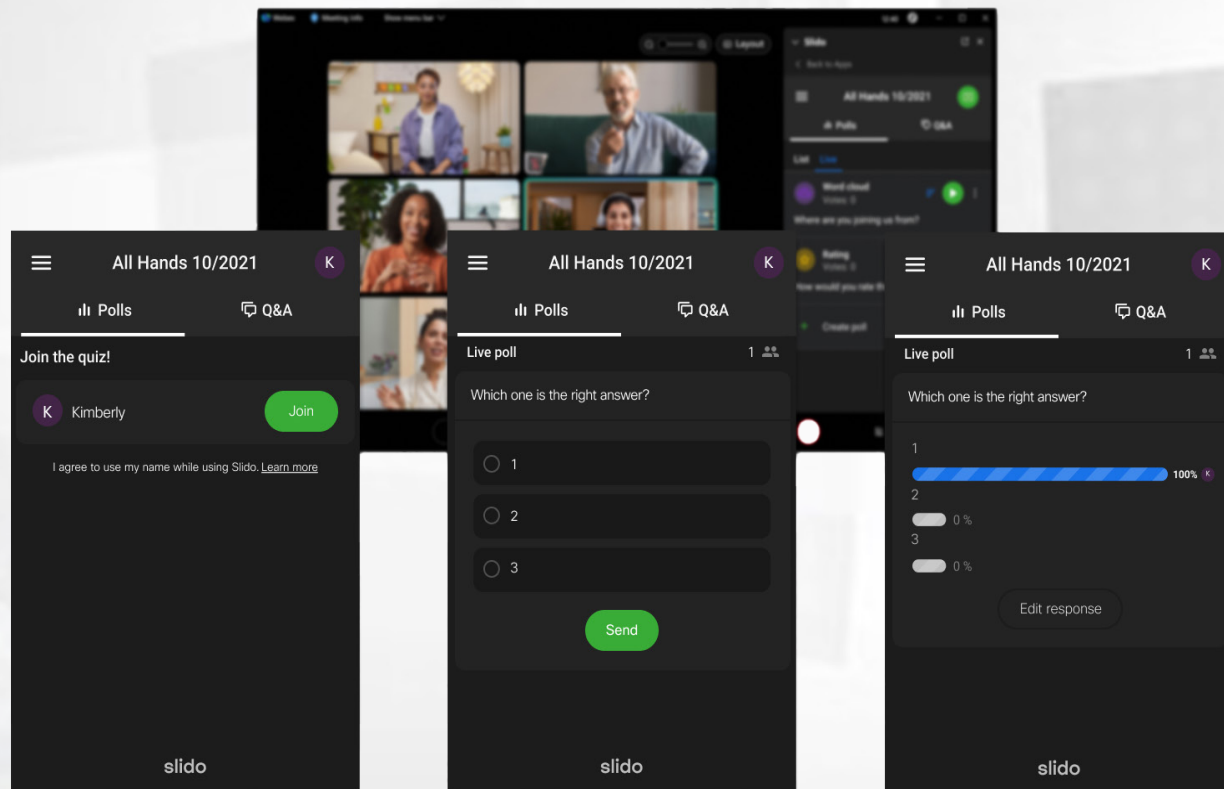
These new features are designed to give agency users the performance tools necessary for efficiency in the important work of serving Alabama constituents. OIT Communications will soon provide more details about the next Webex quarterly session to be held in early 2025. Please contact OIT Voice Services to learn more about Webex or if you have any concerns that OIT can help you resolve.

DID YOU KNOW?

Microsoft 11 Upgrade

Microsoft has announced that support for Windows 10 will end in October 2025. When that occurs, any devices still running Windows 10 will no longer receive software updates, technical assistance, or security fixes from Microsoft.

In early December, the Office of Information Technology (OIT) reached out to all executive-branch state agencies with users and/or OIT-managed devices currently running Windows 10 or a version of Windows 11 that is less than version 23H2. These agencies were notified that OIT will begin deploying a Windows 11 upgrade in early January 2025.

This upgrade is in line with statewide IT policy which requires operating systems and application software to remain supported by the vendor with new security updates. Any agency that believes it possesses a device (or multiple devices) which should continue running the Windows 10 operating system is asked to submit an IT Policy Exemption Request (FORM-IT Policy Exemption Request) to exemption.request@oit.alabama.gov.

Internet Protocol Version 6 (IPv6) Disablement

After a thorough review of the State's network infrastructure and security posture, it has been determined that IPv6 is not currently being utilized by any critical applications or systems. As a precautionary measure, OIT recommends disabling IPv6 until it is required.

Security best practices, such as those outlined by CIS and NIST guidelines, recommend disabling unused network services to minimize security risks. Given that IPv6 is not currently in use, OIT believes disabling these services will enhance security, simplify management, and allow IT and security teams to focus on monitoring IPv4 traffic without unnecessary distractions. When IPv6 is required in the future, OIT will develop a structured deployment plan to ensure proper security controls are in place before reactivating the protocol.

OIT's immediate goal is to implement this change at the system level, including client devices, servers, and other resources where IPv6 is currently enabled. This will reduce unnecessary traffic and mitigate existing security risks. OIT plans to roll out these changes in phases and incorporate them into the Group Policy changes that are part of the ongoing Active Directory Remediation process.

If your agency has concerns regarding the disablement of IPv6, please contact the OIT Service Desk at service.desk@oit.alabama.gov or (334) 242-2222 and request a ticket titled "BUS-Network Segmentation-IPv6 Disablement." This change will be scheduled independently for each agency within the state.al domain, and any concerns should be raised before OIT makes modifications to your managed systems.

CISCO Secure Client AnyConnect

As part of OIT's ongoing efforts to enhance security and improve the overall efficiency of the remote access solutions in use by numerous Alabama state agencies, OIT is excited to introduce Cisco Secure Client AnyConnect as a replacement for the current Ivanti virtual private network (VPN) solution – which will be decommissioned in early February 2025 – that is utilized by many agency users to securely connect to and access resources within the State network.

Cisco Secure Client AnyConnect is a robust, cloud-based VPN solution designed to ensure safe, encrypted access to an organization's network from any location. It provides a seamless user experience, offering secure connectivity across devices – whether employees are working from the office, remotely, or on-the-go.

The new VPN solution will deliver multiple benefits for the State and its agency users, including:

- **Enhanced Security** – AnyConnect offers state-of-the-art encryption and security protocols, reducing vulnerability and enhancing the State's protection against cyber threats.
- **Improved User Experience** – The solution is user-friendly, with intuitive setup and automatic updates, minimizing friction for end users.
- **Unified Connectivity** – As part of Cisco's broader security platform, AnyConnect integrates seamlessly with other Cisco security tools, providing a more cohesive network management experience.
- **Scalability** – Cisco Secure Client AnyConnect can easily scale with the State's needs, supporting remote work and mobile devices without compromising security.

In December, OIT requested agencies with VPN users to assign a point of contact (POC) to reach out to the OIT Service Desk to begin working together on the transition effort. Additionally, OIT is in the process of developing, and will soon share with agency POCs, system-level material (not agency-specific) that will help agencies understand how to install and use the new Cisco Secure Client AnyConnect.

Information Overload Day – October 20th

Did you know that every year, October 20th is recognized nationally as Information Overload Day? As the name suggests, this day is for taking a step back from the enormous amount of information we are faced with on a daily basis.

From social media, text messages, and online news in our personal lives to emails, reports, and meetings (both in-person and virtual) at work, we are constantly bombarded with a plethora of information. On Information Overload Day, we are encouraged to slow down – if only for a brief moment – and allow our overloaded brains to enjoy a few minutes of disconnected peace and quiet in today's fast-paced digital world!

OUT & ABOUT
WITH OIT

2024 State Combined Campaign (SCC)

As part of OIT's ongoing efforts in the SCC, OIT held an inaugural "CANstruct IT" canned food drive and structure contest to benefit the Heart of Alabama Food Bank.

OIT brought their creative, collaborative, and caring skills together and donated an impressive 2,083 pounds of food that will help to provide over 1,700 meals to Alabama families in need. It was a fun and philanthropic event that will be remembered for years to come.

Alabama Digital Government Summit 2024

In November, OIT, in partnership with Government Technology, hosted the 2024 Digital Government Summit in Montgomery, Alabama.

Over 380 people attended the event, which brings together technology focused public-sector professionals with leading industry partners to connect on innovative approaches and new technology discoveries.

Microsoft G5 Meeting

Mark Craymer, Executive Director of Shared Services, speaks at the October 2024 MS G5 Enablement Meeting. Topics discussed included Microsoft 365 enablement updates, Microsoft Defender for Office, and Microsoft Unified Agreement, to name a few.

AWS Alabama Public Sector Innovation Day

In October, Amazon Web Services (AWS) hosted its annual Alabama Public Sector Innovation Day. The event brought together leading industry partners for networking, hands-on workshops, and IT panel discussion sessions.

OIT Secretary Daniel Urquhart presented opening remarks, and Larry Prestwood, OIT Enterprise Project Planner, participated as a session panelist.

Alabama Cybersecurity Planning Committee

In support of Alabama's State and Local Cybersecurity Grant Program (SLCGP), the Alabama Cybersecurity Planning Committee recently held a meeting to discuss the substantial progress underway in this vital initiative to utilize federal grant funds to enable improvements that ultimately increase Alabama's cybersecurity posture.

Tire Swing in the country
Taits Gap, Alabama

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