QUARTER 2 | 2024

OIT ACCESS

STATE OF ALABAMA

OFFICE OF INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY

STREAMLINING IT IN ALABAMA STATE GOVERNMENT

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WELCOME

to *OIT Access*, the State of Alabama 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. With success 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 depend on their services.

OIT Leadership

DANIEL URQUHART
Secretary
State Chief Information Officer

WILLIE FIELDS
Deputy Secretary

STEVE WALKER
Chief Information Security Officer

MARK CRAYMER
Executive Director
Shared Services

ROGER BOWMAN
Executive Director
Support Services

BROOKE COVINGTON
Executive Director
Finance and Procurement

GEN AI TASK FORCE

Update: Secretary Urquhart Establishes Initial Working Groups for Task Force

On February 8, 2024, Governor Kay Ivey issued Executive Order 738: Providing for the Responsible and Productive Use of Generative Artificial Intelligence in State Government. One of the primary directives outlined in EO 738 was for the establishment of a GenAI Task Force.

The task force's responsibilities include exploring the current uses of GenAI, facilitating the responsible and effective use of GenAI, and proposing policies and procedures related to the utilization of GenAI moving forward, all in state executive-branch agencies.

Additionally, the task force will be responsible for submitting a final report of its findings and recommendations to the Governor's Office by **November 30, 2024**.

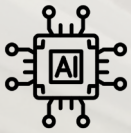
Governor Ivey appointed Office of Information Technology (OIT) Secretary Daniel Urquhart to serve as Chair. He will be joined by other cabinet members, members of the Alabama State Legislature, and higher education representatives.

At the inaugural meeting of the GenAI Task Force on April 3, 2024, Secretary Urquhart announced that working groups would be created to meet the task force's goals satisfactorily and efficiently.

The initial working groups established by the task force are as follows:

Policies and Governance
Will recommend policies and procedures related to the use of GenAI in state executive-branch agencies and develop a governance framework that outlines the policies, procedures, and processes for developing, deploying, and using GenAI

Workforce Education and Training
Will determine how to educate and train current and future workers in using GenAI as the technology matures and as worker knowledge increases



Responsible and Ethical Use of GenAI
Will establish principles for responsible AI use, identify ethical challenges specific to GenAI, and propose guidelines for ethical decision-making in AI development

Data Management and Ownership
Will outline how data in GenAI systems will be collected, used, stored, and shared

Additional working groups may be created as the need arises.

The GenAI Task Force's final report will include an inventory of all instances of GenAI being developed, employed, or procured by executive-branch agencies. Each agency was required to submit its inventory (name and vendor, general capabilities, purpose and proposed use, and any steps taken to ensure the GenAI is used safely and responsibly) by May 1, 2024.

To date, the inventory report has shown that several agencies have begun to pilot GenAI programs such as Microsoft Copilot and similar tools to be utilized by their respective workforces.

The work of the GenAI Task Force will help to ensure the State of Alabama and its agencies are utilizing this exciting new technology in the safest and most effective way possible. The task force is also committed to providing transparent and relevant updates as it moves forward in this important endeavor.

THE 2024 DIGITAL STATES SURVEY

IMPROVING THE STATE OF ALABAMA'S IT

The Digital States Survey is a biennial evaluation of the information technology (IT) practices of all 50 states to recognize their achievements and publish a standard reference for improving the business practices of government IT.

The Center for Digital Government (CDG), a division of e.Republic, the nation's only state and local government and education media and research company, evaluates and scores each state's in-depth self-audit survey. The survey assesses the state's use of technology to streamline operations, increase capacity, and improve service delivery by assigning a letter grade based on the quantifiable data and deeply analyzes the following categories:

- Aligned Leadership
- Constituent Digital Experience
- Continuous Innovation
- Cyber Risk Management
- Data Governance and Use
- Workforce Planning
- IT Investment Management
- Resilience
- Enterprise Computing/Broadband Expansion
- Business Process Alignment

Scoring

The survey responses are scored based on CDG's evaluation of criteria, such as the state's actions to support their priorities and policies to enhance services and operations, cost savings, innovative operations that benefit stakeholders and citizens, and incremental progress since the last survey. To receive a high score of an "A," the state must demonstrate strong results across all the criteria.

Deadline and report release

The online survey submission was due on May 23, 2024.

Scores are usually published in the fall of the same year and announced at the National Association of State Chief Information Officers (NASCIO) annual conference, which is an event that honors the states with awards in various categories and states that earn top grades.

Additionally, the leading states receive a profile in Government Technology magazine.

Potential impact for Alabama

Completing the 2024 Digital States Survey (and improving upon Alabama's previous score of B-) can only elevate our state's IT priorities, operations, plans, and accomplishments moving forward. The potential of earning a top score from a third-party source that highlights the best and emerging technology practices around the country, and gaining nationwide recognition and awards for outstanding and improved performance can only solidify Alabama as a leader in the field. Raising the State's 2024 score will surely compliment OIT's mission and vision of facilitating meaningful communication and collaboration with stakeholders and advancing continuous improvement in IT for the State of Alabama.

AGENCY SPOTLIGHT

ALABAMA LAW ENFORCEMENT AGENCY

Alabama Law Enforcement Agency (ALEA) VNS Application

By: Suzana Willis
IT Project Manager | Office of the Secretary, Alabama ALEA

History

The Alabama Law Enforcement Agency (ALEA) has a rich history-predating the agency-of application development. The Department of Public Safety (DPS) started building a code standard within Microsoft's .Net Framework almost two decades ago. This code standard or framework has provided ALEA with the ability to quickly produce operational applications in an agile, custom, and timely manner.

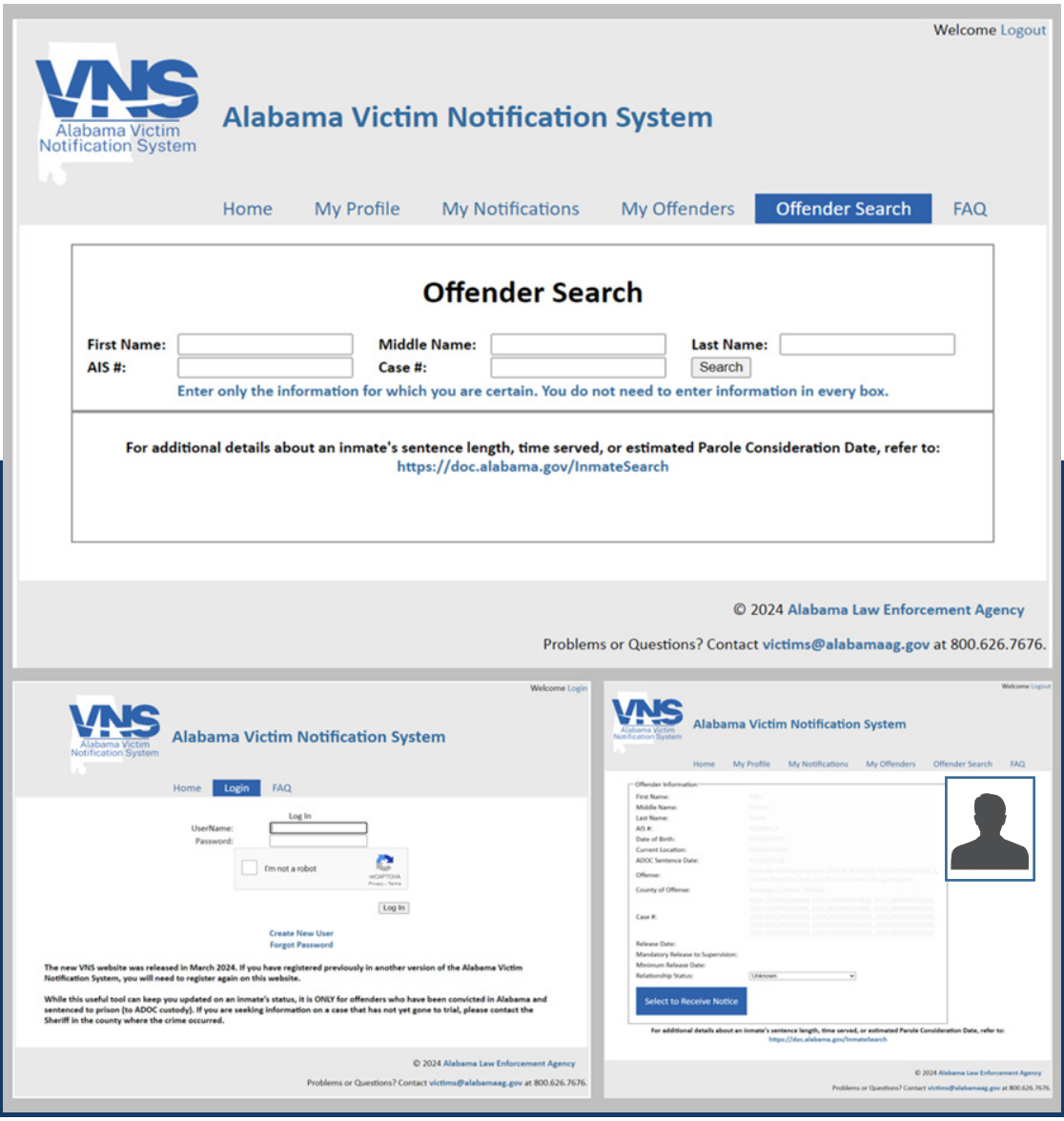
In recent years, ALEA has leveraged this internal code framework beyond the agency to provide statewide solutions, as well as to continue supporting ALEA's daily operations. In 2021, the Fuel Reporting application was developed in conjunction with a commercial off-the-shelf software that provided near real-time reconciling for all fuel and non-fuel purchases. In 2022, the Firearms Prohibited Person Database (FPPD) was released to meet a new law, ACT 2021-246, that required law enforcement access to a database that reports persons unauthorized to carry or possess firearms.

Subsequently, in 2023, five additional operations applications were released to modernize business workflows, digitize paper processes, and pool data sources to provide actionable information quickly to key decision-makers throughout the agency. Those applications included Fleet Management, Equipment Tracking, Supply Request, Project Management, and a Personnel Disciplinary Tracker. ALEA's most recent application release is the Victim Notification System (VNS) that provides electronic, mobile text messages and e-mail notifications to registered victims statewide pertaining to specific offender updates released by the Alabama Bureau of Pardons and Parole (ABPP) and the Alabama Department of Corrections (ADOC).

Prior to the formation of ALEA in 2015, the Alabama Criminal Justice Information Center (ACJIC) began work to implement a statewide notification system for victims of crime in 2007. Three years later, two systems had been developed but were limited to offenders at the county level due to the complexity of the work and limited funding. Near the end of 2010, ACJIC adjusted course and began meeting with victims groups to determine needs and direction for a statewide online victims portal. These meetings resulted in ACJIC's decision to create a portal that influenced legislation that would be introduced the following year by former Senator Cam Ward.

The Alabama Legislature passed ACT 2011-681 in 2011 which created the Victim Notification Implementation Task Force and charged it to support the implementation of a statewide automated victim notification system. In October 2014, the Alabama Crime Victims Automated Notification System (AlabamaCAN) was launched. The law was eventually amended to place responsibility on ALEA to "develop, support, house, and maintain the automated notification system."

In 2015, ACJIC was consolidated as part of ALEA. Work continued between the task force and ALEA in the following years to develop the existing systems. Several attempts were made, but the scope of work continued to be too large and too complex to develop a working, all-encompassing solution.



Working directly with the Secretary of ALEA, Hal Taylor, ALEA Information Technology (ALEA IT) proposed a new internally developed approach that focused on providing notifications to victims, but in a format that would be scalable and sustainable for future use. The task force approved ALEA's plan in April 2021, and the agency began development of what became the Alabama Victim Notification System (VNS).

VNS Facts

The solution design consists of the VNS webservice (Offender Intake and Event information), a public-facing website (victims.alabama.gov), and an administrative website (vso.alacop.gov).

The VNS receives offender and event information from ABPP and ADOC, populates the required information on the websites, and sends electronic (text and email) notifications to registered users when events are submitted. The VNS web service also provides a courtesy response to the submitting agency when events are submitted. The courtesy response includes information on registered users and their preferred notification types. This allows ABPP and ADOC to continue to provide notices via mail service.

Members of the public can access the public-facing website to register, choose their preferred notification type(s), select to receive notices on offenders, view notifications, and opt out of notifications. The VNS is not limited to providing notifications only to victims. Anyone can register on victims.alabama.gov and chose to receive notification on offender(s) based on one of the following relationship types: Victim, Parent/Guardian (minor designation), Immediate Family, Victim's Representative, or Interested Party. Administrative users and Victim Services Officers (VSOs) can use the administrative website to register users, update contact information, view offenders, act on statutory requests, and more. Requirements for VNS notifications were determined based on statutory requirements included in Alabama Code Sections 15-22-36.2 (d), 14-14-5 (g), 15-22-36 (g), 15-22-36.3, 15-22-26.2 (c), and 15-22-36.2.

> *The VNS contains a database of over 440,000 offenders as provided by ABPP and ADOC through the web service.*

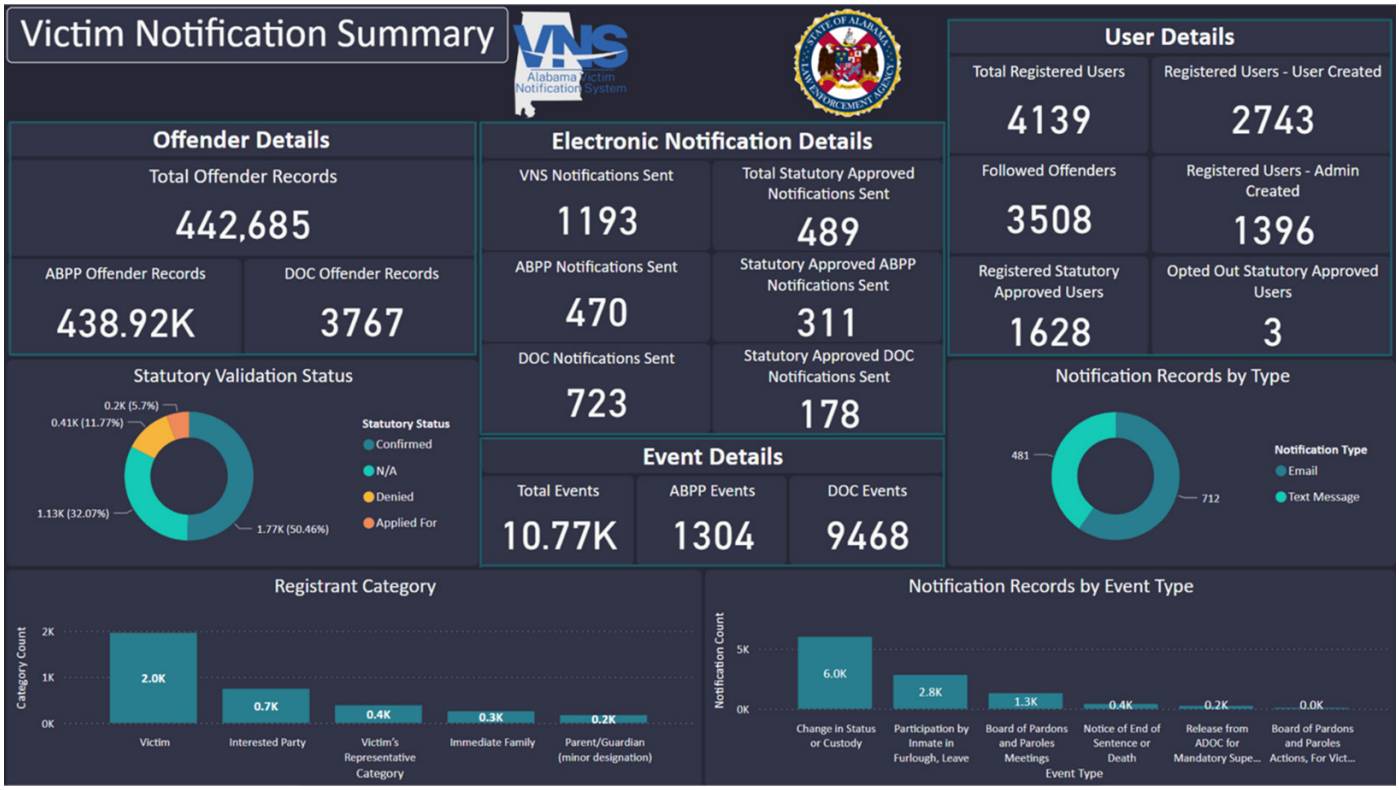
The notifications included in the VNS are:

- Medical Release of Inmate
- Release from ADOC for Mandatory Supervision
- Participation by Inmate in Furlough, Leave, or Program
- Change in Status or Custody
- Notice of End of Sentence or Death
- Board of Pardons and Paroles Meetings
- Board of Pardons and Paroles Actions

In addition to statutory requirements for notification, there were many requirements associated with statutory victims which the VNS was also designed to meet. Processes were put in place that allows ABPP to vet and act on requests associated with statutory victims.

Ensuring data integrity was integral to the project's success. The ALEA IT solution was designed to rely on data owned by ABPP and ADOC. This presented the opportunity to address inconsistencies with offender data captured by various state entities. ALEA, together with project partners from ABPP and ADOC, determined a unique way to identify an offender and implemented matching and validation criteria during the search and added offender web service calls.

Approximately two months after the VNS launch, there are over 4,000 registered users and over 10,000 events that have triggered electronic notifications. Additionally, the VNS contains a database of over 440,000 offenders as provided by ABPP and ADOC through the web service.



Collaboration

The VNS project was successful because of the support and collaboration between many stakeholders. As required by law, ALEA IT worked under the supervision of the task force for the entirety of the project. Task force membership currently consists of representatives from 15 different state agencies and organizations, each with a critical perspective on the needs of victims. ALEA IT provided project updates to the task force on a quarterly basis, at a minimum, and more frequently as the project neared completion. ALEA's working relationship with the task force is ongoing following the launch of the VNS in March 2024, as it is required for the task force to have continued oversight of the system.

ALEA IT also worked closely with ABPP and ADOC technical and business stakeholders throughout the project. A working group of approximately fifteen individuals from three state agencies worked together for nearly three years, from requirements gathering to go-live.

Once the ALEA system was developed, the group worked for nearly a year to test the system. During that time, twenty-three weeks were dedicated to regular testing calls twice a week.

The VNS was launched in a soft go-live on March 4, 2024, and was not publicly advertised to a larger audience until March 20, 2024, when the task force held a press conference to announce its release. Since the announcement, the task force and its individual members have led a public communication and education campaign to ensure victims are aware of the resources available to them through the VNS.

Success

The VNS project was the realization of a plan formed by ACJIC over a decade and a half ago to provide an electronic notification service to victims of crime. Prior to the VNS, victims had been without this level of service for many years, but victims can now be assured of receiving timely notifications. VNS meets a critical need, as victims navigate the criminal justice system, and it provides victims with peace of mind in knowing the status of their offenders. ALEA, ABPP, and ADOC all have unique missions that contribute to public safety and the wellbeing of Alabama citizens. The success of the project-and VNS itself-is another testament to what the State of Alabama can accomplish when agencies work together toward a common goal.

Photo: Alabama Law Enforcement Agency

OIT SERVICE SPOTLIGHT

SSPR
Self-Service Password Reset

On June 1, 2024, the Office of Information Technology (OIT) implemented Microsoft Self-Service Password Reset (SSPR). SSPR enables end users to change or reset their password with no administrative or service desk involvement. If an account is locked or a password is forgotten, users can follow prompts to unblock themselves and get back to work without additional intervention by an administrator.

Take a look at the frequently asked questions about SSPR to gain a better understanding of this useful tool.

SSPR FAQs

Who will have access to this feature?
Agencies operating within the Alabama Shared Microsoft Tenant will have access to SSPR.

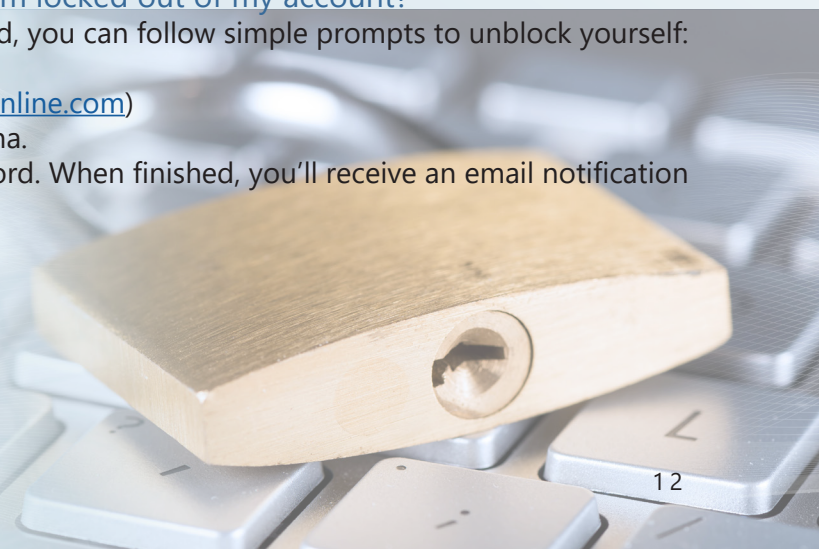
Will I be notified before my password expires?
You will receive a password expiration notification email 14 days before your password is set to expire and subsequent daily notifications until you have successfully changed your password or it expires.

What will an expired password affect?
An expired password will affect your ability to access your State of Alabama email account and possibly your ability to access agency resources essential for your daily work.

Will multifactor identification be required?
Yes, when agency users are added to the SSPR group by OIT, multifactor authentication will be enforced by default and will require authentication methods to be configured. New Microsoft Authenticator users must complete validation to move forward with SSPR.

What should I do if my password expires and I am locked out of my account?
If your account is locked or you forget your password, you can follow simple prompts to unblock yourself:

1. Go to the SSPR portal (passwordreset.microsoftonline.com)
2. Enter user ID (employee email) and pass a captcha.
3. Follow the verification steps to reset your password. When finished, you'll receive an email notification that your password was reset.



DID YOU KNOW?

World Password Day - May 2, 2024

- According to Microsoft, **99.9%** of threats to passwords can be prevented with MFA.
- Credentials became the worldwide leading information theft in **2020**.
- Around **82%** of workers admit to recycling the same passwords.
- **60%** of data breaches involve credentials.

Passwords that protect vital information should be **strong and secure**; changed every few months or at least once a year; and backed by MFA.

Helpful hint: **Never** use the following as passwords as they take **less than a second** to crack:

123456 Password Abc123 Qwerty 111111

Microsoft G5 Monthly Meetings

OIT continues to host a series of monthly meetings to discuss the advantages of consolidating to the Microsoft G5 Licensing Model and to share updates associated with G5 Licensing and other products under the Microsoft umbrella.

The meetings held so far in 2024 have covered numerous important topics such as:

- Reviewing compliance and governance models to help with meeting expectations for upcoming controls within the platform.
- Microsoft 365 Platform Upcoming Features (what is it, where can it be useful, and how?):
- Microsoft Team Premium and Intelligent Meeting Recap
- Microsoft Copilot (M365, Office, Teams, Windows)
- Windows 365 and Azure Virtual Desktop
- Self-Service Password Reset
- Microsoft Defender for Identity
- Microsoft Defender for Office
- InTune

These monthly meetings help OIT to further its mission of empowering agency stakeholders and create meaningful opportunities for engagement and information sharing.

Percipio eLearning

OIT now has a Learning Management Solution for state agencies, Percipio eLearning. Percipio offers a mix of diverse learning materials and formats, from traditional courses and bite-sized video lessons to interactive simulations and gamified modules. The platform tailors personalized learning paths to the user's specific role, learning style, and method of engagement, ensuring that the focus is on relevant skills and knowledge.

Percipio also offers an extensive course library on a wide range of topics, including technical software skills as well as soft skills like communication and teamwork. The platform is accessible anytime, anywhere, and on any device, making it convenient for busy professionals to learn at their own pace.

With Percipio eLearning, State agencies will be able to:

- Upskill and reskill the State's workforce
- Improve efficiency and performance for various positions
- Measure results and KPIs

If you'd like to learn more about how to purchase Percipio, feel free to check out OIT's product catalog (alabamagov.sharepoint.com/SitePages/Percipio-eLearning.aspx) or contact Bonnie Traphan in Product Management at (334) 353-9648.

OUT & ABOUT WITH OIT

2024 Employee Appreciation Week
OIT staff soaked up some sun and enjoyed good times and good eats at the Employee Appreciation Cookout for State Employee Recognition Week.

State Combined Campaign Awards Banquet
Denita Clark, Melanie Talley, Rachel Mayer, and Kenyatta Fishoe represented OIT at the State Combined Campaign Awards Banquet on May 22nd to be recognized for the agency raising 149% of its 2023 monetary goal and achieving a 66% employee participation rate.

Alabama Boys State Visit
OIT welcomed high schoolers from Alabama Boys State (a unique summer program that provides young men with hands-on experience in model state government) to provide a glimpse of what a career in information technology might look like.

GenAI Task Force
OIT Secretary Daniel Urquhart hosted the inaugural meeting of Governor Ivey's Generative Artificial Intelligence (GenAI) Task Force on Wednesday, April 3rd.

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Showcase Alabama's Beauty in Pictures!

We want to hear from you!

Send us your captivating images* of sweet home Alabama!
This is a unique opportunity to show off the beauty and wonder of Alabama state parks, beaches, landmarks, State buildings, historical markers, and more! Your image may be the exclusive feature on the cover of our next newsletter– along with a credit to you! Please send your high-quality, high-resolution images with the subject line, "**Alabama Pics**," to **communications@oit.alabama.gov**.

***Note:** Only images of places (no people or pets) will be considered.
Be sure to include your name, description, and location of your photograph.

"Calm Before the Storm"
The Grand Hotel, Point Clear, Alabama
Photo: Rachel A. Mayer

OIT SERVICE DESK
Service Desk: (334) 242-2222
Service.Desk@oit.alabama.gov
OIT.ALABAMA.GOV

64 North Union Street
Montgomery, AL 36130
Main Office: (334) 242-3800