OIT ACCESS

State of Alabama Office of Information Technology

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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*!

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

Our Mission & Vision

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

VISION
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 the citizens that depend on their services.
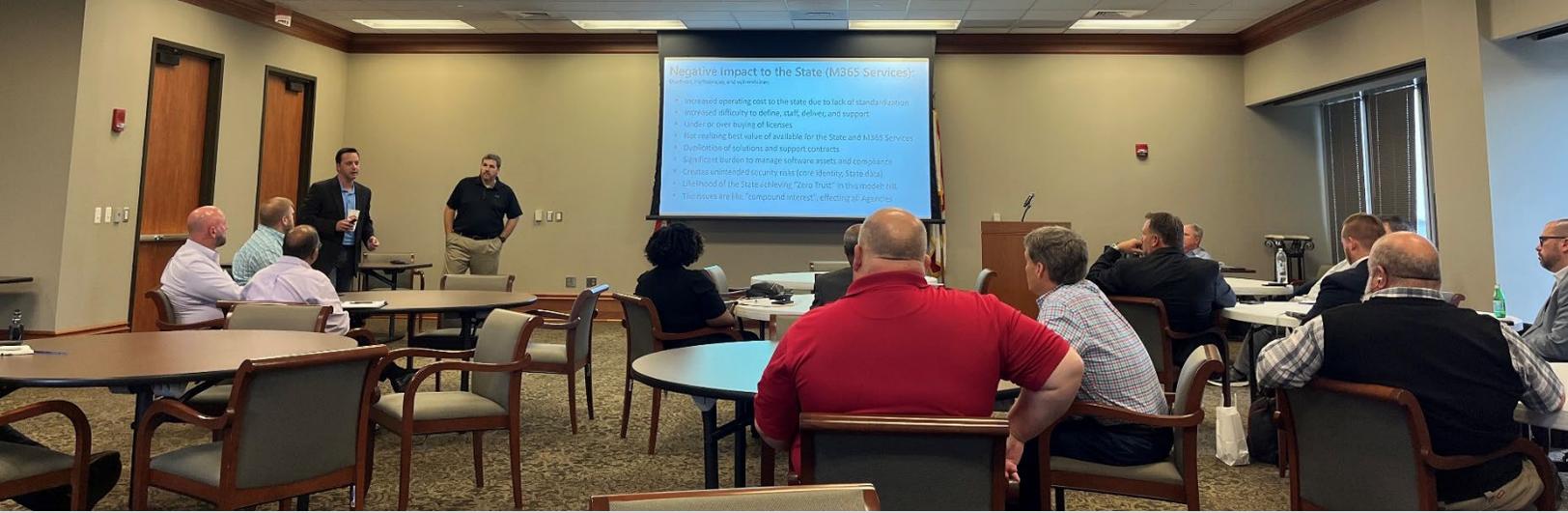
MICROSOFT LICENSING **STANDARDIZATION**

There is considerable benefit in streamlining and standardizing an organization's process-es and procedures. Doing so often enhances the potential for increased organizational effectiveness and simultaneously helps to minimize redundancy and waste. This is especially true in procurement, and even more so when you consider the essential role procurement plays in state government IT.

Since 2016, a "Direct Enterprise Agreement (EA)" model has been in place whereby agencies in the Alabama Shared Microsoft Tenant have purchased their Office 365 licenses directly from Microsoft. Although this model has enabled agencies to satisfy many of their unique individual requirements, it has also resulted in considerable overhead, inefficiencies, and vulnerabilities.

In early 2023, OIT and Microsoft began an initiative to develop a consolidated licensing strategy to help address these critical issues while still meeting the particular needs of agency customers. In Sep-tember and October of this year, a series of Microsoft licensing workshops were held in order to bring a number of agency stakeholders to the table for collaborative discussions about the deficiencies and risks of the current Direct EA model, the advantages of a consolidated licensing model, and how to best move forward as a collective group for the benefit of the State.

These workshops proved to be tremendously productive and generated a great deal of helpful dia-logue and feedback from agency partners. OIT was then able to take this information and work with Microsoft to create a standardized G5 licensing model that drastically improves unification and uni-formity across the Alabama Shared Microsoft Tenant.

Each of the individual agencies that participated in the licen-sing workshops were presented with the new consolidated EA model and unanimously approved of its implementation moving forward. The success of this important initiative would not have been possible without these agencies' com-mitment to partnership and collaboration. A standardized Microsoft EA will now enable the State to better support and truly benefit from a legitimate shared Microsoft environment.

DEPARTMENT OF REVENUE

PROJECT

Cloud computing has evolved quickly over the past decade and has gone from being considered new and innovative to practically an indispensable technology. Its benefits are multi-layered and include the ability to reduce on-premises hardware and software, enable expanded accessibility, improve cost savings, provide centralized data security, and ensure compliance.

In an effort to leverage cloud computing to take advantage of the many benefits mentioned above, the Alabama Department of Revenue initiated a project to utilize Amazon Web Services (AWS) to migrate several of the agency's applications to the cloud. Due to the nature of Revenue's daily business, whereby the agency is frequently required to adhere to strict federal and state regulations and requirements, security and compliance are foremost in importance. In particular, Revenue is tasked with ensuring compliance with Internal Revenue Service (IRS) Publication 1075 requirements for the secure handling of Federal Tax Information (FTI).

To begin Revenue's AWS project, OIT was engaged to create and configure a shared tenancy for the State of Alabama in the AWS cloud. A Control Tower was created to enable OIT to create multiple accounts within the environment and to manage governance rules for security, operations, and compliance at scale relative to the needs and requirements of each individual agency tenant. Landing Zones were then established for tenants to occupy and utilize.

AWS Control Towers and Landing Zones borrow their names from the air traffic control towers and landing zones you will find at airports across the world, as the basic premise is much the same. In actual air travel, an air traffic control tower manages the flow of aircraft into and out of the airport airspace, and guides pilots to and from safe landing zones. In the case of AWS, the Control Tower is occupied by a primary entity – OIT in this case – and the multiple landing zones within a shared tenancy serve as independently administered sectors where agencies have control over the environment and its particular specifications (such as security and resource management).

In July, Revenue and OIT worked together to build an Organization Unit (defined as a logical grouping of accounts in the AWS shared environment) specific to Revenue. The agencies then applied an AWS Landing Zone Accelerator (LZA) template to assure compliance with IRS 1075 before migrating data and workload for Revenue applications. By default, an AWS LZA is configured for IRS 1075 compliance for the secure handling of FTI.

IT personnel from both OIT and Revenue jointly participated in weekly demonstration sessions where an AWS Customer Acceleration Team walked them through the processes of creating the AWS Control Tower and Landing Zones, provisioning a Windows File Server with Amazon FSx (a feature-rich, high-performance file system in the cloud that is built on the latest AWS computing, networking, and disk technologies), and configuring a Key Management System for encryption to prepare Revenue to migrate its data to the AWS Cloud. The agencies also worked with the AWS team to prepare standard operating procedures for state use and defined step-by-step instructions for several common administrative functions.

Revenue is in the process of moving its applications to the AWS cloud and is currently using test data to ensure proper functionality. Once this phase is complete and the project is live, it will serve as a roadmap for other Alabama state agencies to follow. From start to finish, Revenue's AWS project is an excellent example of the success that can be achieved when state agencies partner together and work collaboratively for the good of Alabama and its citizens.

OCTOBER 2023: CYBERSECURITY AWARENESS MONTH

Staying cyber aware is a 24x7x365 necessity in today's fast-paced digital world. From government to business to our own personal lives, almost every aspect of our daily routines is dependent on some form of technology. For this reason, cyber threats are an ever-present risk and they will continue to evolve and increase as our reliance on IT grows in the years to come.

However, that doesn't mean we are defenseless against the malicious activities of would-be bad actors and cyber criminals. Many times, simply being informed and aware of the dangers that exist online is enough to help people avoid falling victim to virtual scams and attacks.

Understanding how important it is to remind Alabamians to constantly be on the lookout for suspicious online dangers, Governor Kay Ivey proclaimed October 2023 as Cybersecurity Awareness Month in the State of Alabama. In her proclamation, Governor Ivey highlighted the role the State plays "in identifying and responding to cybersecurity threats and proactively protecting the security and privacy of its citizens from such risks."

For everyday citizens, Governor Ivey noted the importance of "monitoring your accounts, being conscientious of what you share online, keeping computer software up to date, creating unique passwords and changing them regularly, installing antivirus programs and firewalls, and safely using mobile devices and other internet-connected devices."

By taking a few simple precautions and following a common-sense approach to cybersecurity, we can all remain safer online and protect ourselves from threats like phishing attempts, viruses, ransomware, malware, financial loss, and loss of sensitive data.

OIT
SERVICE
SPOTLIGHT:

Identity Management Platform Update

In the previous issue (Summer 2023) of *OIT Access*, the identity management tool CoreView was featured in the OIT Service Spotlight section of the newsletter. Readers were informed about OIT's plans to migrate away from Cayosoft to the CoreView platform beginning in late September. Details about this effort were also communicated to agency IT directors, managers, and end users via numerous internal notifications.

These communications generated an enormous amount of feedback from agency stakeholders. A significant number of users shared that they had serious concerns about the upcoming migration and were becoming increasingly worried about how CoreView's implementation would impact the daily operations of their respective agencies. One of OIT's top priorities is always to listen, and to respond whenever possible, to the concerns and perspectives that agencies share with us. As such, OIT felt an obligation to pause the planned migration in order to gather more data from our agency partners.

A survey was developed and distributed to provide the opportunity for end users of both platforms to share their concerns, opinions, and perspectives related to Cayosoft, CoreView, and identity management in general. The results of that survey demonstrated that an overwhelming majority of users were not in favor of changing platforms, but instead wished to continue utilizing Cayosoft to meet their agencies' identity management needs.

In addition to circulating the survey, OIT conducted further research into the untapped capabilities available within the Cayosoft platform. In particular, OIT sought to discover how enhanced features within Cayosoft (such as more detailed reporting capabilities, the ability to administer resources in a hybrid environment, etc.) could be implemented to better meet the demands of agency users, especially those who preferred CoreView due to its robust feature set.

After carefully considering agency feedback and evaluating the information collected during OIT's additional research, the decision was made to focus on expanding and improving Cayosoft features and solutions in order to provide users with more functionality within the platform. OIT was keenly aware, and highly sensitive, to the fact that a number of agencies had already migrated platforms. Therefore, OIT assured users that CoreView would remain active and available until all updates and upgrades to Cayosoft are in place.

A follow-up survey is in the process of being created which will request agencies to share feedback regarding their use of Cayosoft since recent changes to the platform have been implemented. If you are an identity management end user, please be on the lookout for the new survey and thank you in advance for any helpful feedback you can provide to OIT!

Recent/Upcoming IT Changes, Updates, & Announcements

Microsoft G5 Licensing

The State of Alabama has made tremendous progress in achieving Microsoft G5 Licensing alignment within the Alabama Shared Microsoft Tenant. This effort will benefit the State by lowering overall costs while simultaneously consolidating and standardizing the licensing process. Microsoft G5 Licensing offers agencies access to a comprehensive suite of productivity tools, cloud services, and advanced security features.

With benefits ranging from seamless collaboration on Microsoft 365 apps to robust options for helping to improve the security posture of the shared environment, these licenses will ensure the State remains agile and secure in today's digital world. Although the licenses by themselves will not accomplish this, it will open the door for that important work to begin and for the State to standardize and improve collectively.

Gordon Persons Power Upgrade

A power upgrade project is planned for the computer room (old switch room) of the Gordon Persons (GP) Building. Work will soon begin to install a new power panel and a new power distribution unit (PDU) to allow racks to be connected to a safe and sufficient power supply in accordance with industry best practices. When the installation work in the GP computer room is complete, a brief power outage will be required on Saturday, January 13, 2024, for the actual power cutover to occur. This outage is planned to begin at 8am and is expected to last approximately 30 minutes, although a 4-hour outage window is scheduled in order to troubleshoot any issues that may arise.

Several agencies in the Montgomery campus will be affected as this brief power outage will impact mainframe connectivity, Montgomery campus fiber connectivity, WAN site connectivity, standalone agency connectivity, GP building connectivity, and has the potential to affect voice and data services for a number of these agencies. An Orange Bar notification with more detailed information about this scheduled activity was sent to agencies on Wednesday, December 20, 2023.

Copper-to-Fiber Conversion

Agencies received a notification in September detailing an OIT initiative to migrate agencies off of the legacy copper-wire network and onto a new fiber network. This is a high priority project for OIT due to the fact that the legacy copper facilities and supporting infrastructure are well past their end-of-life period, maintenance is no longer supported, and copper-based services are becoming increasingly cost-prohibitive.

Over the past few months, OIT technicians have conducted numerous site visits and surveys to collect the information needed to implement a replacement solution for agencies' Primary Rate Interfaces (PRIs) and Flat Rate business lines (1FBs). PRIs are telephone lines which enable traditional phone lines and carry multiple lines of voice and data. 1FBs, also commonly referred to as plain old telephone services (POTS), are used for providing dial tone for voice as well as for analog modems, fax lines, credit card readers, fire alarms, elevators, etc.

To date, all agency surveys have been completed and OIT is ready to begin moving forward on the copper-to-fiber conversions. Please open a ticket with the OIT Service Desk to begin the conversion process for your agency as soon as possible. We look forward to working together to help agencies avoid the exorbitant costs associated with the impending rate increases for copper-based services.

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The State of Alabama Security Council convened in September to meet the new State CISO Steve Walker and to participate in a collaborative discussion about statewide cybersecurity priorities and initiatives.

The 2023 Alabama Digital Government Summit was held on November 13 at the Renaissance Montgomery Hotel and Spa at the Convention Center. Over 300 attendees, vendors, and presenters participated this year! ►

▲
OIT has been working hard to help support the State Combined Campaign! An ice cream social was held in late September and was followed by a Bake Sale and Silent Auction in November, with all proceeds benefiting the SCC!

Keith Cousins, OIT Director of Business Relations and Governance, spoke to County Commissioners, Administrators, and Revenue Officers about Alabama's plans for the State and Local Cybersecurity Grant Program at the Association of County Commissions of Alabama's Annual Legislative Conference in Auburn, Alabama on November 30. ►

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