

OBS Success Story

SEQ CEOs Regional Collaboration



Local Government Toolbox Site

The South East Queensland (SEQ) region represents approximately two-thirds of the Queensland population and one in seven Australians. The region is governed by 11 local governments.

Established in 2004, the SEQ CEOs Regional Collaboration, consisting of the Chief Executive Officers (CEOs) of the 11 SEQ Councils, was developed as an organisation to share ideas, knowledge, resources, expertise, systems and processes.

The SEQ CEOs Regional Collaboration is responsible for coordinating a number of regional initiatives involving SEQ councils in liaison with Federal and State Governments. Current projects include:

- Housing Affordability Fund programme;
- Development assessment management;
- Waste management; and
- Shared services and Officer forum networks.

Challenge

The Environmental Health Officers (EHOs) play an integral role in SEQ Councils. Paul Sotheran, Project Manager, SEQ CEOs Regional Collaboration, explains that “monitoring environmental issues is important because Local Governments in SEQ have the frontline responsibility for licensing and compliance of Environmental Health related activities, for example, in Public Health, such as for Food Outlets.”

One of the major challenges that faced SEQ’s EHOs was the effect of changes in the Environmental Health legislation. Legislation changes occur on a regular basis resulting in the constant need to provide training and updates to employees, each council and their members as well as the general public.

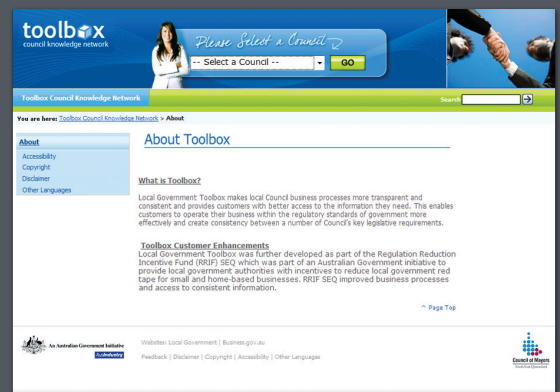
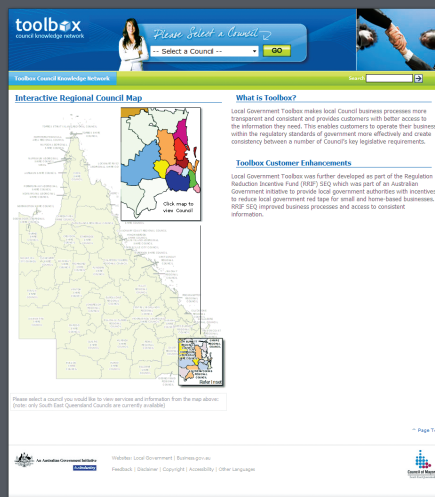
In addition, EHOs were facing an ever increasing challenge of ‘knowledge drain’, due to the effects of an aging workforce and skills shortage in the Environmental Health Science area.

Solution

In response to these issues, the SEQ CEOs Regional Collaboration developed a Local Government ‘Toolbox’ website, with the vision to create an online platform that would enable Environmental Health policies and projects to be shared across local councils.

Toolbox, built on IBM Lotus Notes six years ago, provides EHOs and the community with a consistent set of policies and procedures to refer to.

Toolbox is a one-stop-shop for council staff and the general public to access consistent information and share knowledge across boundaries. It allows for communication between councils, with all EHOs able to collaborate and understand new policies/legislation, as well as to share stories and pass on knowledge to each other.



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Outcome

Toolbox includes standard operating procedures, guidelines, checklists, customer fact sheets, case studies and training, that is council specific. It also houses generic information that relates to all councils, such as State and Federal legislation. In addition, Toolbox includes interactive multimedia, such as "Toolbox TV", a video-based training material that allows council officers to see how to apply their tasks in a consistent manner across SEQ.

Essentially, the Toolbox website makes local council business processes more transparent and consistent as well as providing customers with better access to the information they need, allowing them to operate their businesses within the relevant regulatory standards.

While Toolbox has proven beneficial to the community and local councils, SEQ CEOs Regional Collaboration experienced limitations with the Lotus Notes platform it was running on.

"The cost of licensing, hosting and ongoing support of the Lotus Notes-based platform was becoming too expensive and was also limited in functionality," said Sotheran.

With plans to make Toolbox scalable, cutting edge, dynamic and to introduce collaboration functionality, SEQ CEOs Regional Collaboration decided to progress and expand the Toolbox website and move it onto the SharePoint 2007 platform.

"Toolbox needed to be in an agile, end user configurable environment, which would allow rapid responses to user requirements from a wide array of council stakeholders. As SharePoint was being used in a number of the SEQ councils, the adoption of SharePoint for this shared platform provided the best choice," said Sotheran. The decision to adopt SharePoint was fully endorsed by the SEQ Chief Information Officers Forum.

SEQ CEOs Regional Collaboration selected OBS to redevelop and host the new Toolbox website. In Phase 1 of the project, OBS developed an interim version of the site, with Phase 2 focusing on building the next installation of Toolbox.

"The current interim site that replaced the original Lotus Notes site was scoped and developed in just 8 weeks, and reduced monthly hosting and licensing costs by a massive 80 percent," said Sotheran.

To provide a flexible and scalable solution without additional licensing overheads, OBS proposed a hosted Microsoft SharePoint environment, using Microsoft's Service Provider Licensing Agreement (SPLA), which allowed Toolbox to be developed on a secure offsite platform.

Sotheran explains that this model "proved to be a very cost effective way of allowing the Toolbox solution to expand to other Council service areas such as disaster management, local laws and animal management, and potentially even to other councils outside of SEQ, as demand increases."

Future plans for the website will look at utilising SharePoint's collaboration features to allow EHOs and the community to discuss and act on Environmental Health issues.

"The aim for Phase 2 is to create a collaborative space that allows people to come together, share knowledge and best practices. The current redevelopment of the permanent Toolbox site is well advanced and will add all the functionality and scalability needed to grow the Toolbox solution beyond the current set of users and content areas," said Sotheran.

Benefits

The Toolbox website has substantially benefited SEQ communities and council staff by providing regionally consistent content around Environmental Health.

"The provision of one set of regionally consistent content around Environmental Health has saved both the community and council officers time and money - the information provided on the Toolbox site reduces demand on SEQ Council service staff.

"The ROI on our redevelopment of Toolbox will pay for itself by the end of the first year. Our estimates in regards to cost benefits from Toolbox are approximately \$1 million per annum just for the Environmental Health Officer component," said Sotheran.

As Toolbox is able to provide a mechanism for consistent practice, the SEQ CEOs Regional Collaboration will continue to see significant benefits and risk reduction across its business.

"The OBS team have provided SEQ Councils with a cost effective, fast and flexible Toolbox solution that both customers and suppliers should be very happy with," said Sotheran.