

State of Oregon Uses iLinc to Increase Training Capacity and Effectiveness while Decreasing the Cost of Training



The mission of the State of Oregon's Department of Human Services (DHS) is to help people to become independent, healthy, and safe. By stating goals, measuring results, and reporting progress to the public, DHS complements the Oregon Progress Board's

broader strategy, Oregon Benchmarks, a pioneering set of objectives intended to enhance the quality of life for all Oregonians. DHS is made up of six divisions: Children, Adults, and Families; Addictions and Mental Health; Public Health; Medical Assistance Programs; Administrative Services; and Seniors and People with Disabilities.

Challenge:

Evolve an innovative training program suffering from bandwidth issues and technical limitations into a professional, studio-based training center that delivers live, online courses. Also, reduce costs while increasing the total number of courses offered.

Solution:

Implement iLinc Web conferencing software and VoIP to eliminate bandwidth problems, increase training capacity, and save an estimated four million dollars in only two years.

Building an Innovative Training Program

Oregon's Department of Human Services (DHS) has used Web conferencing to enable workforce training since 1999. An early adopter of virtual classroom technology, the department initially experimented with Web conferencing to complement traditional, live courses – typically on subjects such as new policies or processes, systems/technical training, and program eligibility. Participants who couldn't attend a live session (due to distance, weather or other conditions) could call into the class to hear the instructor over a standard phone line and view presentations online.

Quickly, however, the training staff realized the effectiveness of the online delivery model. In a combined session, it was not only difficult for instructors to manage the different needs of both live and online students, it was also

challenging to verify that the material had been sufficiently retained by learners.

The decision was made to develop a Web-based training delivery program. By the summer of 2000, DHS was offering online training three days a week. Due to demand, this increased to five days a week in a period of only months. Using their former Web conferencing software, DHS had launched an innovative online training program. Up and running, however, a variety of technical limitations loomed.

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DHS, State of Oregon**

Finding the Right Solution

DHS' former Web conferencing system required people to log into an IP address—quite literally, to log into the host's computer—to join a session. This caused tremendous bandwidth issues. When the network was busy, it would take minutes for presentation slides to refresh. Other network users, not in the training session, were affected because of an overburdened shared Internet line. What's more, the phone bridge could only support up to 16 phone lines per session. This forced limitation was difficult to manage and there were significant costs for the long distance phone charges.

David Ray Walker, Training and Development Specialist, DHS, State of Oregon, recalled, “Around that time, we'd started to hear about other solutions with much better technology, so we conducted an RFP process in an effort to find a better product. As a government agency, we of course needed to consider price, but ultimately, we wanted the best product.”

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After a competitive decision-making process that included a cross-section of representatives from Training, IS, and other state partners, DHS chose iLinc. The committee felt confident that iLinc would satisfy all of the financial and functional requirements outlined in the RFP. More importantly, DHS perceived iLinc’s very detailed RFP response as an indication of willingness to build a strong, service-focused relationship.

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iLinc Live and In Action

DHS implemented iLinc Web conferencing software and iLinc VoIP for audio, instantly reducing telephone costs by \$50,000 a year. The training team began using iLinc in a studio environment, running live, online training sessions with multiple contributing roles such as instructors, subject matter experts, technical leads, and assistants. Multiple computers, microphones, and an audio mixer enable the team to create professional-quality broadcasts to live students and to record sessions for later viewing via their LMS. With two full-time studios, DHS now delivers up to eight training classes a week with as many as 200 people per session.

“We see our studio setup as an iLinc best practice,” said Walker. “Everybody gets to communicate, participate, and learn. In some classes, we may have a three or four-way conversation going through the variety of communication and feedback tools.”

Notably, as trainers got comfortable in the iLinc environment, they started to use features not required by the RFP. iLinc capabilities, such as breakout rooms and bandwidth controls, were happy discoveries for trainers and students alike. Also of note, DHS’ example led the way for other departments. The Department of Transportation now uses iLinc for meetings and will eventually use it to deliver curriculum.

Exceeding the Original Vision

DHS reports getting more mileage out of their iLinc software than originally predicted. At first, trainers thought they’d stay within the known realm of delivering standard classes to staff, but now find themselves doing complex compliance training and offering courses to community partners, such as school districts, county health departments and foster care providers. DHS is even using iLinc to present its most sensitive material, such as domestic violence courses—training that they’d never believed could be presented online.

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As an example, DHS used to require people to travel to a particular city for two to three solid days of training. Now, they can break the curriculum into more digestible classes to achieve better retention levels and reduce long productivity interruptions for staff. With iLinc, trainers now have time to delve deeper into subjects, offering training on very focused aspects of particular policies or programs.

“We’re doing things that we wouldn’t have had time to develop before,” summarized Walker. “We did 340 iLinc sessions last year, after initially aiming to do 250.”

DHS estimates that using iLinc will allow them to increase training sessions that would have cost millions of dollars using traditional brick and mortar delivery and is based on the original goal of producing 250 sessions annually. Having already exceeded the yearly goal, DHS may in fact achieve an ROI far greater than

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