

# Will it play in Peoria?



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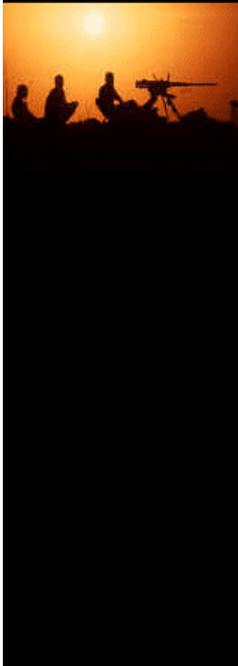
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## In Defense



05/16/03

## The Web is the place to share and save for Va. agency

By [Trudy Walsh](#)  
GCN Staff

Virginia is slowly breaking the stovepiped systems that have driven up costs for IT projects, a state official said this week.

Many managers are putting information online to integrate systems and share data, and they're reaping cost savings for their effort, said Belchior Mira, CIO of Virginia's Human Resource Management Department.

For example, the department built an employee benefits system in 1988. Employees filled out paper forms to enroll or change their benefits. The process, from the start of the enrollment to when the employee received a new benefits ID card, took as long as four weeks.

Benefits administrators spent seven to 10 days manually entering data into a mainframe, and using the system required two to three days of mainframe training.

The department decided not to migrate or convert the legacy system, which runs on a Unisys mainframe platform. Instead, Mira and his team decided to put a Web user interface on it, he said at a Technology Excellence in Government seminar in Washington this week, sponsored in part by Government Computer News and Washington Technology.

The product of putting the mainframe system on the Web was Virginia's EmployeeDirect site.

Employees now enroll or make changes to their benefits directly to the site. The process takes a maximum of 15 minutes, Mira said and has saved the state more than \$300,000.

Mira also said Virginia has improved its employee grievance process through automation.

The process had been very labor intensive, he said. Each year state employees file about 1,200 grievances. Each grievance requires three sets of identical documents mailed to three different agencies. The cost in paper alone was huge.

Over a year ago, the state considered a vendor's proposal to update the grievance system—at a cost of \$125,000. But after hearing dire warnings about Virginia's financial crunch, state officials decided to try a homegrown remedy, Mira said.

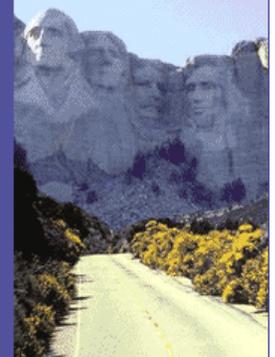
Virginia employees designed an online grievance system, which let officials in the Employee Dispute Resolution Department enter grievance information via the Internet. The paperwork burden for grievances has been reduced by 95 percent, Mira said. And the state has saved at least \$125,000 by using state employees to build the system.

"I figure we're already paying their salaries," Mira said.

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